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BAKER'S EDITION OF PLAYS

WILLOWDALE

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A. W. PINERO'S PLAYS.

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WILLOWDALE

A Play of Country Life in Three Acts

BY

ARTHUR LEWIS TUBBS

AUTHOR OF "VALLEY FARM," "THE PENALTY OF PRIDE," "A DOUBLE DECEPTION," "THE FRUIT OF HIS FOLLY," "THE FINGER OF SCORN," "FOLLOWED BY FATE," ETC.

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WILLOWDALE.

CHARACTERS.

JOEL BASSETT . . . . . *Postmaster and storekeeper*
TOM SKERRETT. . . . . *The accused*
JOSEPH GODFREY . . . . *A lawyer — ambitious and unscrupulous*
CLARENCE DINSMORE . . . . . *The school teacher*
REV. MR. PROSSER . . . . . *The minister*
LEM HACKETT . . . . *Leader of the choir and impromptu detective*
SIMON PINNER . . . . . *Who would rather whittle than work*
MILLIE BASSETT . . . . . *A child of fate*
MRS. BASSETT . . . . . *Joel's wife, inclined to have her own way*
ROSETTA GATES . . . . . *A bit flighty, but a true friend*
*MIS' HAZEY . . . . . *Who imagines things*
OLEANDER . . . . . *The "help," who thinks life is a joke*

*This character may be omitted, if desired, without interfering with the plot. Rosetta Gates may enter alone, in the second act, at the point where Mis' Hazey originally brings her in, and overhear the conversation between Godfrey and Dinsmore, the effect thus remaining the same.

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Time of playing, about two hours and a quarter.

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SYNOPSIS.

ACT I.

Interior of the Willowdale post-office and Joel Bassett's store on an afternoon in September. The accusation.

ACT II.

Sitting-room of the Bassett house, the evening of the church sociable, the following week. The engagement.

ACT III.

Same as Act II, one month later. The wedding.

PROPERTIES.

ACT I.

Counter, with square of post-office boxes; letters and papers in some of the boxes; leather mail bag containing a packet of letters and a number of papers, some loose and others in wrappers; assortment of boxes, glass jars of candy, lamp chimneys, rolls of cloth, etc., on shelves behind counter; barrels, boxes, etc., as seen in a country store; broom and dustpan; stick for Simon Pinner to whittle, and a jack-knife.

ACT II.

Old fashioned anthem books for the members of the "choir." Bible, album and several books on table.

ACT III.

Assortment of articles to represent wedding gifts. Vase and flowers.

COSTUMES AND CHARACTERISTICS.

Joel Bassett. A typical countryman, uncouth but not a caricature. He should be a simple-minded, gentle old man, with thin white hair and a pleasant face. In Act I he wears a plain, somewhat shabby suit, with colored shirt, no collar or necktie; in Act II and III, his best suit, with collar and tie.

Tom Skerrett. A manly young fellow, a bit countrified, but with a well-defined air of gentility, easy of manner and dignified on occasion. In Act I, plain working suit; Act II. neat clothes, not dressy; Act III, a black suit, a little better than in Act II, with a white necktie.

Joseph Godfrey. A man about forty years of age, keen and businesslike, with an austere manner and an evident good opinion of himself. He wears good clothes; in third act a cut-away or full dress suit.

Clarence Dinsmore. A handsome, gentlemanly fellow, about twenty-two years of age or thereabouts; inclined to be "dressy" and at first with some evidence of fastness. He softens, however, under good influence, and becomes a lovable character. He wears in Act II a jaunty summer suit, and in last act a handsome black suit — full dress, if desired.

Rev. Mr. Prosser. Plain black suit or ministerial garb. He is an elderly man, mild mannered, but with a decided firmness in his final speech to Godfrey.

Lem Hackett. Not a country "lout," but a lanky young fellow with some "greenness" of manner, good-natured and somewhat familiar in his treatment of others, but not disagreeably so. Should be made a quaint characterization, comical without too much exaggeration. In first act he is attired as a farmer coming in from his work; in second and third acts in his "dress up" suit.

Simon Pinner. A little old man, bent over and rather feeble of gait; lazy mannered, slow of speech. He wears, in opening act, baggy old trousers; colored shirt; vest, but no coat; a battered old straw hat with the brim torn off. In the succeeding acts he should be more neatly attired, in a new suit of evident cheapness, and, in last act, a collar and flaring red necktie. A better hat for last two acts.

Millie Bassett. A pretty country girl, about eighteen, of unaffected manner. She is naturally somewhat timid and subdued, but as the scene requires becomes quite dignified and speaks with self-possession and firmness. Her first dress is a simple one of light

material, with a becoming hat. Do not let the part be overdressed, as she has no excuse for elaborate costumes. In Act II she may wear a neat dress, light and somewhat fancy, but not elegant; in Act III, white dress of simple texture, a bit "bridy," but not elaborate; white veil and a few flowers.

Mrs. Bassett. A sharp-featured, stern-looking woman of forty-five or fifty; domineering, snappy and unlikeable. At the very last she softens gradually and seems to be completely changed. In opening act she wears a plain calico dress, with apron; in Act II, a neat but plain gown, and in the last act a new dress of plain material, with lace collar, breastpin, etc., prim and precise rather than becoming or elegant. She speaks in shrill tones and is of quick, nervous movements — a typical busy country housewife.

Rosetta Gates. A pretty, dainty village miss of sixteen or seventeen, of blithesome manner, fond of fun and somewhat "flighty," but attractive and winsome. First dress, a light summer costume, large hat with roses on; Act II, becoming costume, preferably of light blue or pink muslin, with ribbons. Act III, white dress with flowers.

Mis' Hazey. A little old lady, of pathetic personality, timid and retiring, except during one of her "spells," when she assumes the airs and lofty manner of the character she imagines herself to be. Her dress is a nondescript get-up, showing a disordered mind — a skirt that is too long or too short, waist much too large, bits of ribbons and artificial flowers pinned about her person; a hat that is a conglomeration of flowers and ribbons, etc. She should be an eccentric character, mirth-provoking, but still touching and of pronounced pathos. While this part is but a "bit," in the hands of a clever actress it should make the hit of the performance.

Oleander. This part should be played by a very large young woman, dressed as a girl of twelve or thirteen years of age. First act, an old calico dress, much too short, with sleeves nearly to the elbows; hair in braids, awry, and generally untidy appearance. Act II, plain blue-checked gingham dress, considerably neater; hair combed and tied with gay ribbons. Act III, a rather grotesque attempt to look dressed up; new dress that fits poorly, sash, ribbons, etc., — as funny as possible without being too ridiculous. She is naturally slow witted, but brightens up on occasions. Her giggle should be worked for all it is worth, without being overdone,

WILLOWDALE.

ACT I.

SCENE. — *Interior of the store and post-office at Willowdale; counter up* R. C., *on end of which is a square of post-office boxes, containing a few articles of mail; shelves back of counter, with rolls of cloth, boxes of various sizes; two or three glass jars, containing candy, lamp chimneys, etc.; about stage numerous barrels, boxes, etc., and the usual appurtenances of a small country store. Discovered,* SIMON PINNER *sitting on a box,* L. C., *whittling and occasionally nodding sleepily;* LEM HACKETT *leaning on counter, and* JOEL BASSETT *behind it, leaning over.*

LEM HACKETT. You wait, Simon, till Mis' Bassett sees them whittlin's all over the floor. She'll give it t' you. Won't she, Joel?

JOEL BASSETT. Wal, I reckon I'd clean 'em up before she comes in, if I was you, Simon. Y' know, mother's kind o' p'tic'lar about how things look. She's liable t' say somethin'. I vum, that mail's late agin. (*Coming out from behind counter.*) I s'pose the train's behind time. (*Goes to door in flat, and looks out.*)

SIMON PINNER. 'R else Nathan's old nags 've played out agin. Y' know that off one is all-fired balky, 'n' y' never can tell when the stage is goin' t' git anywhere. Seems t' me a man in the service of the gove'nment ought t' be made t' have horses that don't balk.

LEM. Nathan says he would, 'f they'd pay him enough. Guess he finds it jest about t'other 'n' which, makin' both ends meet.

SIM. That air son o' his cost him all he could rake 'n' scrape, keepin' him out o' jail.

JOEL. There, now, Si, they ain't no use rakin' that up.

LEM. That's right, Joel, 'n' I say with you — give him a chance. Sech old stone images as you be, Simon Pinner, b'lieve in kickin' a man when he's down, 'n' not lettin' him up agin. 'N' then you pertend t' be a shinin' light in the church. I don't see where y'r Christ'anity comes in.

JOEL. Jedge not, Lem. Mebbe Simon's light is cal'lated t' 'luminate him up, so 't folks can see his faults 'n' fight shy of 'em.

SIM. Guess you needn't talk, neither of y'. If I was walkin' in the darkness of sin, like you, Lem Hackett, I wouldn't talk about folks that c'n see daylight. 'N' I guess you ain't gitt'n' much dazzled neither, be y', Joel? (*Rising and brushing the whittlings from his clothes.*)

JOEL (*by door, looking out*). I ain't got no time f'r religious discussions jest now. Here comes the mail. (*Exit.*)

Enter, L., MRS. BASSETT. LEM HACKETT *moves toward door;* SIMON *does not see her until she speaks.*

MRS. BASSETT. See here, Simon Pinner, what d' you mean by whittlin' all over that floor? Don't you know no better 'n that? You get the broom and dustpan and brush them up, every one of 'em.

SIM. Yes, Mis' Bassett, I was jest a-goin' t'. (*Goes behind counter and gets broom and dustpan.*)

MRS. B. Wal, you'd better. Ain't that mail in yet?

LEM (*in door*). Yes, Mis' Bassett, it jest come. Joel's gone out t' fetch it in. (*Exit.*)

MRS. B. (*watching* SIMON, *who is sweeping up the shavings*). Don't you never do anything, Simon Pinner, but set around 'n' whittle 'n' sncoze? Seems t' me, if I was an able-bodied man, I'd git up some gumption 'n' go t' work.

SIM. I ain't able t'. My rheumatiz bothers me consid'able.

MRS. B. Huh! I guess y'r laziness bothers y' more. If it don't, it bothers other folks. Oh, I ain't afraid t' tell y' the truth, 'n' you know it is the truth, too. It's all right t' git up in meetin' and talk about "laborin' in the vineyard," if y' ain't too shif'less t' do a few odd jobs when you c'n get 'em t' do.

SIM. (*who has been looking at her and holding the dustpan so that all the shavings have slid off upon the floor*). You'd better

look t' hum, 'n read that passage about the tongue bein' an unruly member. Land knows, you keep busy enough, meddlin' in other folks' business.

MRS. B. What's that? If you wa'n't an elder in the church, I'd — (*She sees the shavings.*) Look at that! Now you can jest clean them up agin'. Of all men!

(*She goes behind counter; he brushes up the whittlings again. Enter* JOEL, C. D., *with mail bag. He goes around behind counter and begins to distribute mail into boxes.* MRS. BASSETT, *as he puts each piece in a box, takes it out and examines it closely.*)

MRS. B. There's a letter for Rosetta Gates. A man's handwritin', too. I bet it's from that Dinsmore feller over 'n Dover, that taught school here last winter. (*Looking at letter more carefully.*) I can't quite make out the postmark, but I know well enough. (*Replacing letter in box and taking from another place a closely-written postal card.*) Here's a postal card for Mr. Prosser. Whoever wrote that's stingy enough. Land, they've be'n small enough t' save a cent's postage by writin' s' fine they've got as much as a letter 'd hold on a postal card. Ain't no sign'ture, neither — jest J. B. (*Replacing card, then looking at a rolled-up magazine.*) There's Mis' Tanner's "Fashion Monthly." Huh! I don't see where she gits the money t' pay for it. It costs a dollar 'n' a half a year. I don't know what good it does her t' know about the fashions, anyway. She never has anything.

(*While she has been rattling on,* JOEL *has finished distributing the mail, while* SIMON *has gone out with the shavings to empty them, leaving the broom behind counter. Enter,* C. D., ROSETTA GATES. *She looks into one of the boxes.*)

ROSETTA. There's a letter in our box. Will you give it to me, Mr. Bassett, please?

MRS. B. (*giving her the letter*). From y'r feller, I suppose?

ROS. (*examining the letter, somewhat abashed*). Why — a — I don't know.

MRS. B. Oh, yes y' do know, too. Seems t' me I've seen that writin' b'fore. Looks some like a school teacher's.

ROS. I don't think, Mrs. Bassett, that it makes any difference to you who I get letters from.

MRS. B. My! you needn't fly mad about it! But I guess your folks don't know either. I notice you're always the one that comes to the post-office.

ROS. And I guess the post-office isn't run for your amusement, or to gratify your curiosity. (*Starting to go.*)

MRS. B. Joel Bassett, do you hear how that girl's talkin' t' me? Do you allow your wife t' be insulted?

JOEL. I guess she's right, mother. It ain't none of our business what mail folks git, 'n' we ain't s'posed t' tell.

MRS. B. Wal, if I ever! Accusin' y'r own wife of breakin' the law!

JOEL. I ain't. But I guess I'd let Rosetta git letters from anybuddy she wants t', 'n' not say anything about it.

(MRS. BASSETT *glares at him savagely, as if too angry to speak.* ROSETTA *smiles at him, opens her letter and begins reading it.*)

ROS. I hope you'll excuse me if I seemed disrespectful, Mrs. Bassett.

MRS. B. You needn't worry about my tellin' anybuddy about your letters. I guess I know more 'n that. B'sides, it don't interest me in the least what mail folks get.

(ROSETTA *goes out* C.D., *as* LEM HACKETT *re-enters, followed by the* REV. MR. PROSSER *and two or three villagers. They enquire for mail.* MR. PROSSER *gets his postal and several other pieces; the others get a letter, a paper, or nothing at all. They all stand about, reading letters, papers, etc., or watching the others. One or two purchase something.*)

MRS. B. Did y' give out the sociable in prayer meetin' last night, Mr. Prosser? I wa'n't able t' get there.

MR. PROSSER. Oh, yes, Mrs. Bassett, I gave notice of it, and urged them all to come. I think we will have a large attendance.

MRS. B. I hope so. Goodness knows, it's trouble enough havin' it. 'T upsets y'r house so, 'n' it takes a week t' get cleaned up afterwards. But, then, of course it's for a good cause.

MR. P. Yes, the church needs funds. We're pledged to give twenty-five dollars to missions, and we have nothing towards it as yet.

(*The people all go out, with the exception of* LEM HACKETT, *who stands* R., *reading a newspaper.* JOEL *is behind counter,* MRS. BASSETT, R. C., *and* MR. PROSSER, C.)

MRS. B. Missions! H'm! seems t' me we'd better do a little missionary work right here t' home, b'fore we go t' sendin' money off t' foreign lands. They's plenty chance for it right here in Willowdale.

MR. P. Yes, of course, Mrs. Bassett, there are people in our own community who need improving. None of us are perfect.

MRS. B. Wal, I don't want t' jedge, but I was thinkin' of one or two in p'tic'lar. There's Tom Skerrett. It don't seem t' me it's jest the thing t' keep him on as sexton of the church, after he's been accused of stealin', and only jest escaped gett'n' int' jail.

JOEL. Now, mother, I wouldn't begin that agin.

MRS. B. No, you're too soft-hearted. You'd 'a' kep' him right along here as clerk after that registered letter o' Mr. Godfrey's was missed and ev'rything pointed t' his takin' it, if it hadn't be'n f'r me.

LEM (*looking up from his paper and speaking as if he could no longer hold in*). It ain't anything to brag about, Mis' Bassett, givin' a young man a bad name. It wa'n't proved ag'inst him, neither.

MRS. B. What if it wa'n't? It looked that way, pretty strong. He distributed the mail the day it come, and nobuddy else touched it, and it could be seen plain enough that it had b'en opened and the money took out. Forty dollars, too. If his father hadn't made it good, he'd 'a' b'en in jail.

MR. P. Oh, my dear Mrs. Bassett, don't you think we ought to be a little kinder in our judgment? As Mr. Hackett says, the young man now has a bad name, while it is quite possible, and very probable, that he is entirely innocent. I am very thankful Mr. Godfrey accepted the settlement as he did, and was kind enough not to report the matter to the government. Furthermore, I am gratified that the trustees decided to keep Tom on as sexton. I was successful in persuading them to do so, and I am thankful for it. It is the only employment he can secure, it seems, and while the pay is small, it is better than being entirely idle.

MRS. B. Yes, and Joel was one o' the trustees that decided t' keep him. You can be sure it was ag'inst all I could say.

MR. P. I am quite sure of that, and I am glad Mr. Bassett held out against your persuasive powers. (*He has gone to* C. D.) Good afternoon. (*Exit.*)

LEM. And I say "amen" to that. I guess that's the time the minister give y' a little dig, Mis' Bassett. Y' see, folks know it ain't very often Joel don't do as you say.

MRS. B. You'd better mind y'r own business, seems t' me.

LEM (*about to go*). Guess I had. They ain't none too many people doin' that, around here.

(JOEL *chuckles, as if enjoying his wife's discomfiture; she looks around at him, and he suddenly assumes a long face.* LEM *is about to exit, but pauses as* OLEANDER *enters* L. *She drags herself in lazily, with a dish in one hand and a wiping towel in the other.*)

MRS. B. Wal, what do you want now?

OLEANDER (*jerking her head toward* L.). They's a duchess in there. The duchess o' Marlburrer, I think she said she was. Come t' make y' a call. (*She giggles.*)

JOEL. Wal, I vum, we're gitt'n' up in the world, ain't we, havin' the nobilities t' call on us. 'N' you with a caliker dress on, mother.

MRS. B. Huh! As if I didn't know. Wal, I'll go right in. They's no sayin' what she'll be up to, if y' leave her alone. So she's a duchess t'-day, is she? (L.) Last week she was a hull queen.

OLE. She's jest too comical. I have t' laugh.

MRS. B. I call it a pity, 'n' nothin' t' laugh at. You'd better go 'n' finish washin' them dishes. Stop y'r gigglin'!

OLE. Yes, ma'am. (*She puts the dish cloth over her mouth, smothering laughter, and as* MRS. BASSETT *goes toward her, dodges and drops the dish, breaking it.*)

MRS. B. There! now see what you've done. I ought t' keep track o' the dishes you break, 'n' take it out o' your wages. You're always breakin' somethin'.

OLE. (*still laughing*). If y' did, I wouldn't have nothin' left.

MRS. B. Now don't git sassy. Pick up them pieces 'n' come and finish your work.

(*If the dish should fail to break when* OLEANDER *drops it, the speeches in reference to it should be omitted.*)

OLE. Yes, ma'am.

Exit MRS. BASSETT, L.

JOEL. I guess you'd laugh at a hangin', Oleander.

OLE. I reckon I would. I always do, jest when I hadn't ought t'. I laughed at Mis' Hammond's funeral, right in the solem'est part. And when I see Mis' Hazey — well, I'd laugh if I knew it would make me deef 'n' dumb the next minute.

MRS. B. (*calling loudly from off* L.) Olean — der!

OLE. Yes, ma'am. (*Toward* L.). I 'spect Mis' Bassett 'll jest give it t' me. (*Exit* L., *giggling.*)

LEM. That girl takes the cake. She always laughs like that?

JOEL. Yes, pretty nigh the hull time. No matter what y' say to her, scold 'r anything else, she laughs. She must have funny-bones all over her.

LEM. She don't look much bony. Lazy, ain't she?

JOEL. Ruther. Mother says she don't earn her salt, but I guess she does, 'n' her pepper, too, 'n' somethin' t' put 'em on. All's the matter with her, she's growin' too fast. It takes her strength.

LEM. Growin'? Gosh! ain't she stopped yet?

JOEL. Guess not. I d' know but we'll open a side show, if she keeps on, 'n' charge ten cents t' see her.

LEM. And have Mis' Hazey for another freak, I s'pose? She'd draw a crowd.

JOEL. Poor Mis' Hazey, I'm sorry f'r her. She ain't t' blame f'r bein' s' flighty. I tell y', when a woman loses all her folks, 'n' 'most all she had in the world, 'n' goes crazy, it seems kind of a shame t' laugh at her.

LEM. I know it does, but it is comical, the way she imagines she's so many grand folks. Seems t' enjoy it jest as much as if she was, too.

JOEL. Yes; y' see she read s' many novel books, she got her head full o' them high notions, then when all her trouble come and took her mind, that's all they was left, 'n' she thinks she's duchesses 'n' things. Poor cret're, she

ain't got a soul left in the world t' call her own. It's a good thing she's got that pension, if it ain't but twelve dollars a month. If it wa'n't f'r that, I guess she'd have t' go t' the poor house.

LEM (*who has gone up* C., *about to exit*). Here comes Joe Godfrey now, after his mail. I always feel kind o' riled when I see that man. I don't put much stock in him. It's my opinion, if I was t' give it, that he's a regular shyster. (*Goes to* L.)

JOEL. I ain't goin' t' dispute y', Lem, nor say I agree with y', neither. All is, I mistrust they's something behind that registered letter business. Can't nobuddy make me b'lieve Tom Skerett opened it and took the money out.

LEM. N'r me. It don't look likely, in the first place. Godfrey claims it was opened and sealed up agin', don't he?

JOEL. Yes; he tries t' make out it had forty dollars in it, and that Tom steamed it open, took out the money, 'n' sealed it up ag'in.

LEM. Tom Skerrett ain't such a fool. He'd know he couldn't do that without gett'n' found out. What if it had been opened? It might 'a' been done b'fore it ever reached this office. Did Godfrey prove that the money was ever put into it?

JOEL. No, he didn't, and what's more, he seemed mighty willin' t' let the matter drop and not report it to the gov'-ment. Put it that he had nothin' ag'inst Tom, and if I'd discharge him, he'd let the matter drop where it was.

LEM. Huh! They's somethin' behind it all, you mark my word. Godfrey's in love with your Millie, ain't he?

JOEL. Wal, he pertends t' be. Y' see, he's been makin' up to her lately, all of a sudden like, and her mother's mighty took up with him. Says Millie's got t' give up Tom Skerrett when she can get a chance like Joe Godfrey, b'cause he's a lawyer 'n' owns a house 'n' lot and a pair o' horses. As if all that, 'r a heap more, could make up to a gal f'r losin' the man she loves 'n' marryin' one she don't care a snap f'r.

LEM. And a pompous old shrimp like Joe Godfrey, too. He ain't worth bein' mentioned in the same week with Tom Skerrett, if he has got property. If I was you, I wouldn't let my daughter be made unhappy. Don't you let her give up Tom. You 'n' I'll organize a little private detective force

of our own, and see 'f we can't get him out of this scrape, so 't he can marry Millie. Everybuddy knows they've been as good as engaged, this long while. What d' you say, Mr. Bassett? Want t' join me and see 'f we can't beat the smart Lawyer Godfrey at his own game?

JOEL. M'm — wal, there's mother — she's mighty sot on Millie's havin' Godfrey, 'n' when mother —

LEM. Yes, I know — you're afraid to go ag'inst her. Well, don't, yet. We'll let her 'n' Godfrey think they're havin' their own way, 'n' see 'f we can't give 'em a surprise party by 'n' by. Are you with me?

JOEL (*after a slight hesitation*). Y — yes, Lem, I be. You're a good friend of mine, and Tom's, too. I'll do it.

LEM. Good. (*They shake hands.*) That's settled, and the detective firm of Bassett and Hackett begins business from this minute — all on the quiet. Wonder what's keeping Godfrey. (*Crossing and looking off* C.) Oh, he stopped to talk t' the minister. Here he comes. (*Crossing back to* L.) Now to see if we can't get a clue.

Enter JOSEPH GODFREY, R. *He goes at once and looks into his post-office box, where there are several letters, not noticing* LEM. JOEL *hands him the letters; he opens one and begins reading it, without speaking.*

LEM (*after a pause*). Nice day, Mr. Godfrey?

GODFREY (*looking up casually*). Eh? Oh, yes, very pleasant. (*Again reading.*)

LEM (*watching him closely a moment, then speaking in a careless tone*). Er — any registered letters to-day, Mr. Godfrey?

GOD. Any — what's that?

LEM. I say, any more registered letters, lately?

GOD. What do you mean by that?

LEM. Simple question enough, ain't it? Ought t' 'xplain itself. I just was a-wondering if you'd had any more letters steamed open and the money stole. Let me see, where was that one from that you claim forty dollars was taken out of?

GOD. I consider that my own affair, Mr. Hackett. It doesn't concern you in the least.

LEM. Well, it concerns Mr. Bassett here, seeing he's post master, and it does concern me a little bit, too, when you try t' make out Tom Skerrett is a thief. Tom and me's been

pretty good friends ever sence we used t' set t'gether in school, 'n' you nor anybody else can't convince me he'd steal s' much as a slate pencil, and when it comes to forty dollars — well, you'd have to bring pretty strong proofs, and I ain't see proof of any kind yet.

GOD. There's proof enough, if I cared to produce it. But I don't wish the young man any harm, so I have overlooked the matter, and —

LEM. Overlooked several important points. Eh, Joel?

JOEL. Seems t' me so, Mr. Godfrey. F'r my part, I preferred t' report the matter to the post-office department and have a thor'er investigation. That was Tom Skerrett's idee, too, only my wife and Millie sided with you t' let it drop. I've kind o' made up my mind I hain't got no right t' drop it. Seems t' me it's my duty t' report it to the gov'ment.

GOD. (*alarmed, but trying not to show it*). Not at all — not at all, Mr. Bassett, if I don't wish to have it done. If I make no charge, you are not required to report it.

JOEL. Wal, you're a lawyer 'n' ought t' know. But you make charge enough t' disgrace Tom Skerrett 'n' keep him from gett'n' any honest employment. You insisted on my dischargin' him, 'n' you've given him a bad reputation. Seems t' me that's bad enough.

GOD. Wouldn't it be worse to send him to prison?

LEM. So it would, Mr. Godfrey — if you could do it. But it would be better, I take it, to prove him innocent, and restore his honorable name.

GOD. Perhaps that wouldn't be so easy — if I presented my case.

LEM (L.). Well, if I was Tom Skerrett, you'd present it mighty quick, Mr. Joseph Godfrey, and prove what you've charged ag'inst me, or pay big damages for malicious slander, I can tell you that.

GOD. (*smiling sarcastically to cover his discomfiture*). Oh, you would? Well, it happens you are not the man, so we'll drop the subject.

(*He starts up* C., *and is about to go out, when he meets* MILLIE, *who enters* C. D., *pausing in evident confusion as she sees him, as if she would retreat without speaking to him if it were possible. But she is obliged to come in, pausing up* C. *as he speaks.*)

GOD. (R. C.). How do you do, Miss Millie? I'm glad to see you.

MILLIE (*coolly*). Very well, thank you, Mr. Godfrey. (*Crossing down to* L. *and speaking to* LEM *with marked cordiality.*) Why, hello, Lem. Where have you been lately? I haven't seen you for some time.

LEM. Oh, I've been around, as usual. Guess you're the one. Don't see you here in the store as I used t'. Ain't so much attraction, eh? — since —

MIL. (*interrupting him, going up to counter*). I just met Rosetta Gates, father, and she told me some news. She had a letter from Mr. Dinsmore, and he says he has been engaged to come back and teach the next term of school.

JOEL. You don't say so? So you hired him ag'in, did y', Mr. Godfrey?

GOD. Yes, seeing I was trustee, I thought I had a right.

JOEL. S'pose y' had, but it ain't hardly what I 'xpected. They was consid'able opposition to Dinsmore's comin' back.

GOD. Yes, I know it — opposition from a few who had some personal spite. He's a good teacher, the best we have had here in years, and I don't think we ought to let petty opinions interfere with the advantages of the children. Dinsmore may have been a trifle fast, but — well, at any rate, he is coming back. And I take it your friend Miss Gates isn't much sorry, is she, Millie?

MIL. No, she is very glad. She says we ought to give him another chance. They were very good friends before anything was said against him, and she hopes to help him do better. I think she is right, too. I don't believe in deserting a friend, even when he is charged with something worse than being "a trifle fast."

LEM. Stealing, for instance. Eh, Millie? Not till they's some proof, anyway.

MIL. No. And strong proof at that.

(GODFREY *stands up* C. *near exit;* JOEL *behind counter;* MILLIE *at end of counter,* L. C., *and* LEM *seated down* L. LEM *now rises and goes to* C., *looking straight at* GODFREY.)

LEM. I guess you know what she's drivin' at, don't y', Mr. Godfrey? She means Tom Skerrett, and she means to stand by him the way she ought t', and the way some of the rest of us intend t' do, too.

GOD. (*ignoring him and speaking to* MILLIE). I am sorry, if you misunderstand the part I have taken in this matter. I intended to do Mr. Skerrett a kindness in not making a charge against him. You know, I might have made him a great deal of trouble.

MIL. (*warmly*). And do you pretend to think you haven't done so, as it is? What do you call trouble, Mr. Godfrey? He has been discharged because of your accusation, and people shun him as if he were really a thief. He has friends, though, who intend to stand by him and help prove his innocence, and I am one of them.

LEM. Good for you, Millie — and I'm another.

GOD. I wish you success. If he is innocent, it should be proven, by all means. (*Going up* C.) If I can be of any assistance, let me know.

(*He reaches* C. D., *and is about to exit, when* TOM SKERRETT *enters. They look at each other in silence for an instant,* TOM *with suppressed anger, and* GODFREY *rather disdainfully. Finally, the latter starts to go out.*)

TOM. Wait! I have a word to say to you.

GOD. (*pausing*). Well?

TOM. I have tried to see you, several times, lately, and you have shunned me. You are always out when I call at your office, or pretend to be too busy to see me. Now that I have an opportunity —

GOD. I beg to be excused. This is no place for a private conversation. If you have anything to say to me, come to my office.

(*He tries to go out, but* TOM *gets in his way and compels him to remain.*)

TOM. No. If you are afraid to face me, say so. I am quite willing Mr. Bassett and Millie and Lem Hackett should hear all I have to say, and if you refuse to listen, it is because you are afraid to do so.

GOD. Afraid? Nonsense! I am in a hurry, that's all. Come to my office.

TOM. And find you out, as usual. No. You shall hear me here, and answer me, too. It's only fair.

JOEL. That's so, Mr. Godfrey. Hear what the boy has t' say.

(GODFREY *disdains them altogether, and again starts to go out.* TOM *draws back, as if not daring to trust himself to speak or act, and* MILLIE *hurries up and faces* GODFREY, *forcing him to remain.*)

MIL. You shall listen, Mr. Godfrey — if not to him, to me!

JOEL. Millie, Millie, child — don't!

MIL. I must, father! He has wronged Tom, and he shall not refuse to give him fair treatment. (LEM *goes up and persuades* JOEL *to keep silence.*) Mr. Godfrey, you have accused Tom Skerrett of opening a registered letter addressed to you and taking out forty dollars in money. What reasons have you for thinking that he did it? What proof have you that he did?

GOD. Let him prove that he didn't.

MIL. That is not the thing, just now. I asked you what proof you have that he opened your letter?

LEM. Come, Godfrey, be a man. If you can't — why, then be as much of a one as you can.

GOD. Take care, sir! I may have my patience tried too far and take you all at your word.

TOM. Do! We want all the proofs you have. I am not afraid to face any charge you may bring against me. I don't deny that a registered letter came for you on the day you say, nor that I took it from the bag and placed it in your hands. That is all I know about it. If it had been opened and the money taken out, it was entirely unknown to me.

GOD. You also admit, I suppose, that I brought the letter back to you, after I had opened it and found the money missing, and that I showed you plainly enough that it had been steamed open and sealed up again, very skillfully, but not well enough to prevent detection? I did not say you did it, but the inference was plain enough.

LEM. But there is nothing to prove, Mr. Godfrey, that the letter was not opened at the other end, or on its way here.

GOD. Most improbable. It was mailed in Dover, only fifty miles from here, and the bag is never opened after it leaves there until it gets here. The postmaster at Dover distinctly remembers placing the letter in the bag, and there is not the slightest ground to suspect him,

TOM. And yet you suspect me, with no more proof than that the postmaster at Dover was as guilty as I?

GOD. The case is plain enough. If I am willing to let the matter drop, it seems to me you ought to be glad to do so.

TOM. While the suspicion of being a thief hangs over me? No, never! If the money was in the letter, and was not taken out until it got here, then there is a conspiracy against me, and —

GOD. Conspiracy? Do you accuse me of —

(*They approach each other threateningly, as if about to come to blows.*)

MIL. (*running between them*). No, no, Tom, don't!

(MRS. BASSETT *enters* L., *in time to see the above; she stands an instant looking on.* JOEL *has come out from behind counter and advanced to* R. C.; LEM *is down* L. *There is a short pause, before* MRS. BASSETT *comes down.*)

MRS. B. What's this? Tom Skerrett, you leave this store! What do you mean by coming here, where you know you ain't wanted?

(*The others draw back, and* MRS. BASSETT *and* TOM *are* C.)

TOM. I'm not so sure I am not wanted, Mrs. Bassett. Because you don't want me is no sign I am without friends here.

MRS. B. What do you mean? If you think Millie Bassett is goin' t' have anything to do with you —

MIL. (*coming down and speaking bravely, though with evident nervousness*). I am, mother! I mean to stand by Tom!

MRS. B. What? You disobey me, when I have told you never to see him or speak to him again? We'll see about that. You go in the house and stay there. We'll see whether you'll do as I say 'r not.

MIL. No, mother, I can't. I —

MRS. B. How dare you talk back to me? Go t' your room, I say!

MIL. (*going to* JOEL, *as if for protection; he puts his arm around her*). Father!

MRS. B. Joel Bassett, don't you dast t' encourage her t' go ag'inst what I say. If you do —

JOEL. But, mother — don't you think you are a little too hard?

MRS. B. I know my business, and you know I mean what I say. (*To* MILLIE.) Go in there! (*Pointing* L.; *to* TOM.) Now, you leave this store!

LEM. Hold on, Mis' Bassett. This a public place, and he has as much right here as anybuddy.

MRS. B. This is our store, and he'll go if I say so. If he won't f'r me, mebbe he will f'r my husband. Joel, you tell him he can't stay here, 'r come int' this place ag'in.

JOEL (*coming down*). M'm — wal, y' see, mother, this is the post-office, 'n' I guess 'most anybuddy's got a right t' come in here. It ain't f'r you n'r me t' f'rbid 'em.

LEM. That's right, Joel. Ain't it, Mr. Godfrey?

GOD. I have nothing to say. This is not my affair.

LEM. Oh, it ain't? Wal, seems t' me you've got consid'able t' do with it.

MRS. B. If you've got any pride, Tom Skerrett, you won't come where y' know y' ain't wanted. And as f'r you and Millie, you'd better git that idee out of y'r head at once. She'll never marry you if I have t' lock her up in the garret and keep her there.

JOEL. Mother! (MILLIE *is weeping.*)

TOM. That's the kind of thing you are hard and cruel enough to do, Mrs. Bassett, but you won't do it, for all that. (*He goes to* MILLIE, *puts his arm about her, and she cries on his shoulder.*)

(MRS. BASSETT *starts toward them, as if to force them apart, when* MIS' HAZEY *enters* L., *and all the others stand back and watch her. She at first seems utterly oblivious of their presence, and with a vacant stare goes to* C., *with uplifted head and a haughty manner, trying to assume the airs of a grand lady.*)

MIS' HAZEY. Where is the Dook? Is he not here? He was to meet me here, in the conservatory, at ten o'clock. Listen! (*Waving her hand lightly toward* R.) The music from the ballroom! I was the belle of the ball. How they all looked at me, how they admired my beauty and this lovely dress and these priceless jewels! Ah, 'tis he! (*Listens intently; then with a disappointed tone.*) No, it is that villainous

Baron, who seeks to marry me against my will! Go away! I hate you! I hate you! (*Glaring at* GODFREY, *who is* R.) You! you are the Baron! (*With a commanding gesture.*) Go! Go, I say! I loath and detest you! It is the Dook I love. Go, or I will kill you! kill you! (*She rushes toward* GODFREY, *but suddenly falls back, as if regaining her senses.* MRS. BASSETT *has started toward her, followed by* LEM HACKETT, *but they draw back as* MIS' HAZEY'S *mood changes. She looks about piteously, cowering as if in fright, her form quivering, her hands trembling, and her voice wailing piteously.*) Oh! oh! my poor husband! he's dead, he's dead! See! there's my little Robbie, my baby — he's dead, too! Both dead! Don't let them take them away from me. No, no, I want them, I want them! Don't let them cover them up in the ground. Oh, my husband! my Robbie, my baby boy!

MRS. B. Poor thing, she's livin' it all over ag'in.

(JOEL *has brought a chair to* C.; *they place* MIS' HAZEY *in it, and she sits bent over, moving back and forth, weeping and crying out.*)

MIL. Oh, how sad! (*Going to her and kneeling by her side.*) There, there, Mrs. Hazey, don't. It is all right.

MRS. B. You go away. I will see to her.

(MILLIE *rises and goes back to* R. C. OLEANDER *has entered* L., *and stands looking on, giggling and stuffing her apron into her mouth.* MRS. BASSETT *helps* MIS' HAZEY *to rise; the latter suddenly straightens up, looks about her for a moment, as if dazed, then seems to come to her full senses. She glares at the others, then tosses her head and hurriedly exits* C. D., *without looking back. The others look after her in silence.*)

JOEL Wal, if that don't beat all!

MRS. B. She's all right now. It's jest one of her spells. She has 'em every once in a while. (*To* OLEANDER.) Stop your gigglin' 'n' go on in there. I guess they's enough fer you to do. (OLEANDER *smothers a giggle and starts to go out* L., *but lingers and looks on during the following scene.*) Now, Millie Bassett, you come with me. It's time we had an understandin'. (*She starts* L., *motioning* MILLIE *to follow her, but the latter advances to* C., *where she stands and speaks with a show of defiance, though not insolently.*)

MIL. Yes, mother, it is. It is time you understood that I love Tom and intend to be his wife.

MRS. B. You —

TOM (*going and putting his arm about* MILLIE). Yes, Mrs. Bassett, she has promised to do me that honor.

MRS. B. Honor! Honor, and you a thief! I call it —

TOM. Stop, Mrs. Bassett! I will stand much, and forgive you much, for Millie's sake, but you have no right to call me such a thing as that. I am not a thief, I am an honest man, and as sure as there is a just God in heaven, I will prove it yet, to you and to everybody, and when I do, then — and not until then shall I make your daughter my wife!

(TOM *and* MILLIE *stand* C., *his arm still about her, she leaning confidingly against him, both facing* MRS. BASSETT *bravely.* MRS. BASSETT *glares at them, in suppressed rage.* JOEL *has started down* C., *looking scared, but pleased;* LEM HACKETT, R., *laughing to himself gleefully;* GODFREY *up* R., *with an expression mingling fear and scorn, and* OLEANDER *extreme* L., *with her apron over her mouth, still giggling.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE. — *The sitting-room of the* BASSETT *house, the next week. It is about eight o'clock in the evening. The room is plainly and neatly furnished, after the manner of a typical country house; rag carpet, hair-cloth furniture, a table down* L., *with a few books, an album, etc.; several cheap chromos and other pictures, family portraits, etc., on wall. Small cabinet organ, or melodeon up* R. MRS. BASSETT *is discovered seated* L., *watching* OLEANDER, *who is placing furniture and arranging articles.*

MRS. B. Put that chair ag'inst the wall over there. (*Pointing up* R.) Not crooked like that — straight up ag'inst the wall. Turn that one around the other way. Fix the things on the table. Put the album on the other side, and the Bible where it'll show more. I guess we want the Bible in plain sight when we're goin' t' have a church sociable for the benefit of the heathen. Heathen! H'm! I guess a few of 'em 'll be here t'night. (OLEANDER, *who is following directions, snickers.*) Stop y'r gigglin'! You're one of 'em, and the worst of the lot.

OLE. Yes, ma'am, I know it.

MRS. B. Oh, you do? Then why don't you try t' be better, 'n' not act 's if you'd jest come off a Feejee island, 'r some sech place?

OLE. Yes, ma'am, I will. (*Giggling.*)

MRS. B. Then b'gin now, by stoppin' that gigglin', 'n' see 't you b'have y'rself t'night when the folks 'r' all here. Come here till I look at y'. (OLEANDER *goes to her, and turns around for inspection.*) I guess you'll do. You ought t' be thankful t' have a nice dress like that. What if we hadn't took y' t' take care of?

OLE. I d' know. 'Spect I'd 'a' had it tougher yet up t' that poorhouse.

MRS. B. I guess you would.

OLE. I'm goin' t' stay here till I get growed up to a woman and get married. (*Giggling.*) Yes, ma'am — to a perfectly grand man, with whiskers under his nose, stickin'

'way out like this, 'n' with a horse 'n' carriage of his own, 'n' a gold watch with a long gold chain, and wavy hair, 'n' —

MRS. B. Good land! what be you talkin' about? You're jest like Mis' Hazey. Now you go 'n the kitchen 'n' see 'f everything's all right. It's about time folks b'gun t' come.

(OLEANDER *goes* L.; *she is about to exit when* MILLIE *enters* L., *and she pauses to listen.*)

MRS. B. (*to* MILLIE). Oh, it's you, is it? Got over mopin'?

MIL. I have not been moping, mother. I don't see how you can blame me for being sad, after all I have gone through.

MRS. B. (*rising;* MILLIE, L. C.; MRS. BASSETT, C.). I want you t' understand you ain't gone through nothin' compared t' what y' will, 'f you're goin' t' be so stubborn 'n' go ag'inst your pa's and my wishes. It won't do no good. You've got t' do as we say.

MIL. As you say, you mean. Father never will insist upon my marrying a man I don't like, just because he has property.

MRS. B. Your father will do as I say, and you will do as he says. We'll see whether you're goin' t' stick up f'r that worthless Tom Skerrett, after what he's done —

MIL. After what he has been accused of doing. Remember, it has not been proved against him, and it never can be. If it hadn't been for you, he wouldn't be in such trouble now, and you are doing it just to separate us, but you shan't — you shan't! (*She breaks down and weeps.*)

MRS. B. That's right, cry! But you won't move me. I know what's f'r y'r own good, 'n' I mean t' have my way. Mr. Godfrey means well by y'. He loves y', 'n' he's asked if we'll let him have y' f'r his wife. Do you think I'm goin' t' let y' lose sech a chance? No, sir! (*Enter* JOEL, R.) You'll either say "yes" to him, 'r you'll get out of this house!

JOEL. Oh, mother!

(MILLIE *runs to him, and buries her head on his shoulder, weeping.*)

MRS. B. Oh, you heard what I said, did y'? Wal, it's

jest as well. 'N' I mean t' stick to it, too, 'n' you'll bear me out in it.

JOEL. No, mother, I won't! This little gal don't love Mr. Godfrey; she loves Tom Skerrett, and even if she can't marry Tom, she shan't be made t' have the one she don't want.

MRS. B. We'll see. You'd better not have too much t' say, Joel Bassett. I ain't askin' you yet what t' do 'r how t' do it.

MIL. (*looking up and speaking rather timidly at first, then gaining courage and facing* MRS. BASSETT *bravely*). No, but you are asking me to do something which would break my heart and ruin my life. You are asking me to marry a man I don't like, and make the one I love think I am mean and false. It is not right; it is cruel — cruel — and you have no right to expect it.

MRS. B. No right, eh? (*Going toward her angrily.*) Then I'll take a right. You're goin' t' do as I say, or —

MIL. (*straightening up and facing her defiantly*). Or what? You will beat me as you used to, as you would if I were a child again? Well, you had better not try it. I am a woman now, not a child to submit to your cruelty, and I — I defy you! I — (*She breaks down and again goes to her father, who tries to comfort her.*)

JOEL. There, there, dearie, don't you fret so. You go now and I'll see if mother and I can't fix it some way. (*He leads her toward* L., *and she goes out sobbing. He comes back to* C., *and for a moment assumes an air of bravery, as if he intends to assert himself; but this attitude soon vanishes beneath* MRS. BASSETT'S *onslaught.*) Now, mother, don't you think —

MRS. B. I think it's time you understood that I mean what I say. That girl's got t' have Joe Godfrey, or — well, you can imagine what.

JOEL (*looking at her doubtfully, then coming to a realizing terror of what she means*). Mother! You wouldn't — you don't mean you would ever tell her —

MRS. B. I mean that you've got t' help me bring her to her senses 'n' do as I say, 'r I ain't goin' t' hold my tongue any longer. I'll tell her.

JOEL Not — not about! — Oh, mother, not the secret?

MRS. B. Yes, the secret. I've kept it eighteen years f'r

your sake, 'n' hers, but I guess the time has come when it can serve my purpose best by bein' told. I guess it would bring her to her senses quick enough, if she knew.

JOEL (*in great terror, grasping his wife's arm and almost kneeling to her*). Oh, no! — no! Don't tell her that. You won't tell her — you won't! — will y'?

MRS. B. Not if you do 's I say. I wan't t' see her well married off, 'n' Mr. Godfrey's a good match for her. If you had any pride you'd agree with me, 'n' she'll thank me f'r seein' what was f'r her own good, afterwards. You help me make her give up Tom Skerrett 'n' marry Mr. Godfrey, 'n' the secret's safe. If y' don't — (*There is a knocking* C. D.) There's some of 'em comin'. You remember what I say. (*She goes to door and admits* REV. MR. PROSSER.) Good evenin', Mr. Prosser. Come right in.

MR. P. Good evening. Good evening, Mr. Bassett. I thought I'd come early, so as to help receive the folks. I'm glad it's such a pleasant evening.

MRS. B. Yes, it's a lovely night. We ought t' have a good attendance. Let me take y'r hat. (*He gives her his hat.*) Come right in the best room.

(*She goes out* R., *followed by* MR. PROSSER. JOEL *stands* C., *and just as they disappear there is another knock* C. D. *He goes and admits* JOE GODFREY *and* CLARENCE DINSMORE. *He takes their hats.*)

JOEL. Good evenin'. Come right in. Why, how d' do, Mr. Dinsmore? So you've come back t' Willowdale, have y'?

DINSMORE (*shaking hands with* JOEL). Yes, Mr. Bassett, back again, thanks to my friend Godfrey, here. Thought I'd come to the sociable to-night, so as to meet all the folks. I just arrived this afternoon.

JOEL. Wal, jest make y'rselves comf'table, 'n' I'll go 'n' tell Mis' Bassett you're here. They ain't nobuddy else arrived yet, but the minister. (*Exit* R.)

GOD. You must make yourself especially agreeable this evening, Dinsmore, and try to win these people over. I have been considerably criticised for bringing you back to teach again this year, but — well, you know I wanted you.

DINS. M'm — yes, I know. You knew I wanted to come, you mean to say, and that it was safer for you to fix

it so I could. After our little transaction, it is hardly best for you to go much against my wishes, is it?

GOD. Oh, come, now, no threats. We're working together, and my success means yours.

Enter MRS. BASSETT, R.

MRS. B. Good evenin'. (*They reply politely.*) Sorry t' keep y' waitin' s' long, but I had t' see t' something, and couldn't get away f'r a minute 'r two. Wal, Mr. Dinsmore, I didn't jest expect t' see you back here.

DINS. No?

MRS. B. No, I didn't. But I guess the attraction was too strong f'r y' t' stay away, wasn' it?

DINS. (*pretending not to understand*). Oh, yes, I like Willowdale very much.

MRS. B. And one 'r two that's in it in p'tic'lar, I guess — one especially; wal, Rosetta's a pretty gal, 'n' smart enough, too.

GOD. You've hit it, Mrs. Bassett.

DINS. But really, I —

MRS. B. Oh, you needn't bother t' deny it. I guess I know who's be'n writin' letters to her. (GODFREY *laughs*, DINSMORE *looks somewhat annoyed.*) She'll be here t'-night, in all her glory. She's got a brand new dress t' wear. Miss Patchin told me she'd be'n makin' it. I don't see, f'r my part, how that girl's father c'n afford t' let her dress the way she does. But of course it ain't none o' my business. Looks as if it might be yours, though, some day, Mr. Dinsmore.

DINS. Oh, it hasn't gone so far as that yet.

MRS. B. Of course not — yet. But they's time. Mr. Godfrey thinks of takin' a wife, too. Don't you, Mr. Godfrey?

GOD. Yes, indeed, very seriously, if I can get the one I want.

MRS. B. What do you think, Mr. Dinsmore? he does us the honor t' want t' marry our Millie. He must love her, t' want her when she ain't got a thing but herself t' offer. Don't you think so?

DINS. Of course he does. Your daughter is a fortune in herself, and he's a lucky man if he wins her.

GOD. Ah, I know that. And win her I must.

MRS. B. And you shall, Mr. Godfrey, trust me for that.

It won't take her long t' get the nonsense out of her head about Tom Skerrett, and t' make her see the honor you're a-doin' her. (*There is a knocking* C. D.) There, some more of the folks are comin'. You'll have t' excuse me.

(*They smile and look at each other knowingly, while she goes and opens door. Enter* ROSETTA GATES, *followed by* MIS' HAZEY *and several people.* MIS' HAZEY *holds her head very high, seeming not to see the others. They all stare at her, some of them smiling.*)

MIS' HAZEY (*turning toward* L., *and speaking to an imaginary person*). Go! tell your brother that the Lady Olivia spurns his suit! (*Crossing to* L. *with much dignity.*) Go, I say! (*Turning and pointing with a commanding gesture.*) Yes — yes — I laugh him to scorn! Ha, ha! Ha, ha! (*She laughs hysterically, and, tossing head, exits* L., *hurriedly.*)

ROS. She's the Lady Olivia Delaplaine, to-night. Isn't it funny?

MRS. B. You all make y'rselves t' home, 'n' I'll go 'n' see to 'er. (*Exit,* L.)

(GODFREY *and* DINSMORE *are down* R., ROSETTA *goes down to them; the others remain up stage, removing their things, chatting together, etc.*)

ROS. How do you do, Mr. Dinsmore? I'm real glad to see you.

DINS. Thanks. Glad is no name for it with me. I'm more than delighted to see you.

ROS. Oh, Mr. Dinsmore, before all these people. Be careful. (*He has approached her fervently, as if about to kiss her. One or two of those up stage are watching them and nudge each other, smiling, pretending not to notice, as* ROSETTA *and the two men look their way.* ROSETTA *draws away from* DINSMORE, *embarrassed.*) Ain't he awful, Mr. Godfrey?

GOD. He didn't notice them. Love is blind, you know, Miss Gates.

ROS. Now, Mr. Godfrey!

DINS. Dear me, then I'm afraid Rosetta doesn't love me, Godfrey. She saw.

Enter OLEANDER, L. *She pauses and looks at them, giggling; they turn and look at her.*

Ros. Oh, it's Oleander. Nobody pays any attention to her.

Dins. That so? Not much like some girls, is she? I know one I can't pay too much attention to. (*Looks at her meaningly.*)

Ros. (*drawing away*). Oh, Mr. Dinsmore — see, they're watching us.

Dins. Well, let them. They watch everything and everybody.

Ole. (*coming down to them and speaking confidentially*). Say 'f you go 'n the other room, y' might git a chance in there. Ain't nobuddy there, hardly.

Dins. Well, I declare! The girl isn't such a fool, after all. Come, Rosetta. (*They go out,* R., *laughing.* Oleander *looks after them, giggling. The others come down and* Oleander *retires up* L.)

A Woman. Did you notice Rosetty Gates flirtin' with the school teacher?

Another Woman. I guess I did. Ain't it scand'lous? He ain't the kind of a feller I'd want a girl o' mine t' have much t' do with.

The First Woman. No, but good land! She'd take up with anything that wore pants 'n' could raise a mustache. (*She pronounces it "mush" tache.*)

Enter Mr. Prosser, R.

Mr. P. Ah, good evening, brothers and sisters. I am glad to see so many of you here. (*He shakes hands with different ones.*) This is an occasion when we must renew pleasant associations, and enjoy the fellowship of kindred minds. (*He sees* Godfrey, *who is standing* R.) Ah, Mr. Godfrey, how are you this evening?

God. Well, thank you, Mr. Prosser. Trying to raise some money for the heathen, are you?

Mr. P. Yes. Do you wish to contribute? It would be appreciated.

God. Nothing special, just now, I guess. Times are kind of hard.

(*The other people have been up stage, some sitting, some standing, conversing, looking at books, etc., paying little attention to*

MR. PROSSER *and* MR. GODFREY. OLEANDER *has gone up* C., *and now opens the door, and* TOM SKERRET *walks in. None of the others appear to see him. He looks at them a moment as if expecting recognition, then turns away sadly and goes down to* L. C. MR. PROSSER *goes to him, extending his hand.*)

MR. P. Good evening, Tom. I'm glad you came.

(*He turns to* R., *as if to call* GODFREY'S *attention to* TOM'S *presence, but* GODFREY, *with a cold glare at* TOM, *exits* R.)

TOM. You see how it is, Mr. Prosser. I came at your request, and because you convinced me that it was best to face them and show them that I am not afraid — that I have nothing to be ashamed of. But it is hard, very hard.

MR. P. Have courage, my boy. They will believe in you yet. You are innocent. I believe it, God knows it, and with his help, we will yet prove it to them all.

TOM. I haven't lost faith yet, Mr. Prosser, nor hope. I can't believe but what right and justice must conquer in the end, but it's mighty hard waiting for the end to come.

MR. P. I know, my boy, I know it is; but it may not be so far off as we think.

(*The people have all gone off to* R., *except* OLEANDER. *She now comes down.*)

OLE. I'd like t' skin every one of 'em, mean, stuck-up things!

MR. P. My child!

OLE. Well, I would! What right they got, snubbin' Tom here like that? Guess you'd better give 'em some o' the proceeds o' this sociability, seein' it's fer the heathen.

MR. P. Such talk does not sound well, I —

OLE. No, the truth don't, sometimes. Heathen? I guess you'd have t' give most o' the money t' that old skunk of a Godfrey —

MR. P. Stop! I will not allow you to use such language. It is most disrespectful and shocking. (*Exit* R.)

TOM. Never mind, Oleander. Don't get yourself into trouble taking my part. I appreciate it, of course, but it can't do any good, and, as Mr, Prosser says — it doesn't sound well.

Enter C. D., LEM HACKETT *and* SIMON PINNER.

LEM. Hello, guess we're late. I stopped f'r Simon, 'n' it took him s' allfired long t' git ready —

SIM. Wal, I didn't 'spect t' come, 'n' I had t' change m' clothes. Got on m' new suit.

OLE. (*giggling*). My! ain't it scrumptious? I bet it cost as much 's two dollars.

SIM. Two dollars? I cal'late it did. It cost five-ninety-eight, 'n' at a bargain sale 't that.

TOM. It looks very nice, Simon.

LEM. That's what I told him. He's afraid he'll spill somethin' on it — ice cream 'r milk, 'r somethin'.

TOM. Well, it isn't likely to be the milk of human kindness — here.

LEM. Brr! no. I reckon that's all froze up int' ice cream. Eh, Oleander?

OLE. Two kinds — lemon 'n' vanilla. It's bully, too. I turned the freezer — 'n' Mis' Bassett give me a taste. (*Giggling.*)

MRS. B. (*calling loudly, off* L.). Olean — der!

OLE. Gee! she's callin' me now. I'll have t' go. (*Exit* L.)

(LEM *and* SIMON *have removed their hats, and laid them or hung them up stage;* SIMON *now sits up* C., TOM *and* LEM *are down front.*)

LEM. Well, Tom, how goes it?

TOM. None too well, Lem. They all cut me when I came in, except Mr. Prosser. They didn't seem to see me at all. I'm beginning to get used to it, but it doesn't get any easier to bear.

LEM. Godfrey here?

TOM. Yes, and Clarence Dinsmore, too, I suppose. I heard he was in town, and of course he would come. He and Godfrey are pretty thick, you know.

LEM. Yes, I know. I know they're in league together too, as well's I want t'. I saw enough last winter t' convince me of that, 'n' I'm willin' t' bet Godfrey never got him back here in the face of s' much opposition except f'r some purpose, 'r b'cause Dinsmore's got sech a hold on him that he had t'.

TOM. Why, Lem, what do you mean?

LEM. I mean I've got my eyes open, that's all, 'n' am doin' a little detective work on my own account, and yours.

TOM. (*grasping his hand*). Lem!

LEM. Oh, I ain't found out much t' speak of, yet, but I smell a rat, 'n' I don't cal'ate t' let it git away from me, nuther. (*Enter* MILLIE, L.) There! who's that?

MIL. Oh, Tom, I am so glad you came! I was so afraid you wouldn't.

(*She has gone to him, and he takes both her hands in his and kisses her.* LEM *pretends not to see, goes up and takes hold of* SIMON, *and leads him off* R.)

TOM. I didn't intend to come, at first; but Mr. Prosser thought it would be best, and I am not entirely without friends here. I have you, and — (*looking about*) and Lem — why, where is he? He's gone.

MIL. Yes, he and Mr. Pinner went in the other room. I guess they knew we would like to be alone.

TOM. We don't get much chance now-a-days, do we? I don't suppose I ought to have come to-night, Millie. Your mother won't like it, but I felt as if to stay away would be to admit that I was afraid, and I am not.

MIL. Of course not, Tom, and it was the very best thing to do. I don't know what to do about mother. She is worse than ever, lately, and she — she threatened to turn me away from home if I didn't give you up and accept Mr. Godfrey.

TOM. Oh, she never could do that. She wouldn't!

MIL. I don't know, Tom. You don't know how cruel she can be. And she seems to be winning father over to her side, too, or compelling him to do as she says. I don't see why Mr. Godfrey wants to marry me. I don't believe he he loves me.

TOM. That wouldn't be hard, dear, for anybody, but I agree with you that it doesn't seem likely in his case. Still, I don't see any other reason why he should seek to marry you. Perhaps you'd better not say too much against it, just yet, and we'll see what turns up. I hope to be able to prove my innocence before long, and then we can defy them.

MIL. But I can't pretend to accept him.

TOM. Oh, no, that isn't necessary. Only don't be too rebellious, and trust to me.

MIL. I will, Tom.

TOM. Brave little woman.

(*He kisses her, and just as he does so* OLEANDER *appears* L. *They pay no attention to her.*)

OLE. (*giggling*). That's right, don't mind me; but you'd better be careful, 'cause the ogre-ess is comin'. She'll eat y' both up, if she ketches y' doin' that.

MIL. Come on, Tom, let us go and take a walk. It's real pleasant out, and I don't feel like staying here with all these people.

TOM. We will. (*They go to* C. D.) Oleander won't tell on us, will you, Oleander?

OLE. Guess I won't. (*Giggling.*) Don't ketch me tellin' on no lovers. Might git told on m'self.

(*Exit* TOM *and* MILLIE, C. D. OLEANDER *stands watching them, giggling. Enter* MRS. BASSETT, L.; *she goes to* OLEANDER *and takes hold of her.*)

MRS. B. What you doin' here? I told you t' stay in the kitchen.

OLE. Nothin'. All right, I will. (*Starts* L.)

MRS. B. Wait a minute. Who was that you was talkin' to, jest as I come in?

OLE. Nobuddy.

MRS. B. They was too. I heard 'em. Who was it?

OLE. Oh, I guess it was some of the comp'ny. I didn't notice.

MRS. B. Don't you lie t' me. You go 'n the kitchen 'n' git the things ready for the refreshments. It'll soon be time to serve 'em. (*Exit* OLEANDER, L.) She was lyin,' I know, but they ain't no use tryin' t' do anything with her. (*She goes up and looks off* C. D.) Jest as I thought. It was Millie, with Tom Skerrett. (*Enter* JOEL, R.) Oh, it's you, is it? See here. There goes Millie and Tom Skerrett out there. He's had the cheek t' come here, and in spite of all I've said, she's took up with him agin. I want you t' go after her 'n' tell her t' come right in here. As for Tom Skerrett, you know what you can tell him,

JOEL. I don't think I c'n go, mother.

MRS. B. Don't think you c'n go? Well, I guess you can, 'n' pretty quick, too.

JOEL. I ain't goin' t' have nothin' t' do with it.

MRS. B. You ain't, eh? Then you can suffer the consequences. I'll go, 'n' if I do, you'll wish it 'd be'n you. (*She starts to go out, but he bars her way.*)

JOEL. I — wal, I'll go, if you insist, mother, but —

MRS. B. Oh, you will? I thought you'd change y'r tune. Don't you dast t' come back here without her, neither.

JOEL (*about to go out*). Oh, mother, I wish you wa'n't quite s' hard —

MRS. B. 'N' I wish you wa'n't quite s' soft. Hurry up, 'r I'll go.

(*He goes out* C; *she goes* L., *and is about to exit when* ROSETTA GATES *enters*, R.)

ROSE. Oh, Mrs. Bassett, where's Millie? We're going to play some games, and we want her.

MRS. B. She'll be here 'n a minute. Her pa's gone after her, out there with Tom Skerrett.

ROSE. Oh, Mrs. Bassett, you don't really believe what they say about Tom, do you?

MRS. B. Believe it? Of course I do. You ain't got nothin' 't say in his defense, have you?

ROSE. Yes, I have. I don't believe Tom is a thief. I'd much sooner believe it was Mr. Godfrey himself.

MRS. B. Well, I declare! You'd better tell him that.

ROSE. I don't know but I would, if I had a good chance. Folks toady to him and are afraid to say "boo!" to him, just because he's got more money than anybody else. For my part, I detest him, and it wouldn't take much to make me tell him so.

MRS. B. Well, you don't seem t' detest his friend Mr. Dinsmore, very much, from the way you're carryin' on with him.

ROSE. Carrying on? I don't know what you mean.

MRS. B. Then I'll tell y'. Flirtin', that's what, 'n' gett'n' y'rself talked about. I guess your folks must be blind, t' let y' have anything t' do with him.

ROSE. My folks know they can trust me, Mrs. Bassett. And they are not cruel enough to make me marry a man I don't like.

MRS. B. I guess if they was a little more like some parents, though, you would have more respect f'r y'r elders, 'n' not be quite so meddlin' 'n' sassy. I guess if you was my girl, you wouldn't be quite s' flighty. (*Exits* L.)

(ROSETTA *looks after her a moment, then goes up and looks off* C. *After a slight pause she goes out* C., *and just as she disappears*, GODFREY *and* DINSMORE *enter*, R.)

GOD. It's a relief to get away from those stupid, ignorant people. What a bore these country entertainments are, any way.

DINS. Yes, when the right one isn't present. It seems both our charmers have fled. Suppose we look them up. (*Enter* L., MIS' HAZEY, *unnoticed. She is in one of her saner moods, and appears to understand what the men are saying, as she goes to back of stage, where she remains by door, listening intently.*) But, let them go. It isn't my way to force myself upon a girl, the way you are doing. If she doesn't want me, I don't want her.

GOD. That's all right when there's nothing but the girl to consider, but where there's a fortune to come with her, it is quite a different matter. You know well enough how it is with me.

DINS. Yes; you don't care a snap for Millie Bassett herself. Of course, you've got to have some excuse for wanting to marry her, so you pretend to be madly in love with her, and that silly mother of hers favors you because you're the big man of the village, and are supposed to have a lot of money. It's a good thing she doesn't know you are on the verge of financial ruin, and that her daughter is your only hope. I'm afraid your chances are rather dubious, though.

GOD. Oh, I don't know. I reckon the other fellow's are about as dubious.

(MIS' HAZEY *has shown a dawning intelligence of what she is hearing, and now hastens out* C., *returning at once with* ROSETTA GATES, *motioning her to be silent, and pointing to the two men. They both listen;* ROSETTA, *as the scheme becomes clear to her, barely being able to refrain from bursting out in indignation.*)

DINS. I'm not so sure of that. The young lady seems

inclined to have something to say about it, and, as for Tom Skerrett, he isn't downed quite so easily as you hoped, either.

God. You're too impatient. We have succeeded in getting him discharged and branded as a thief. That registered letter scheme worked like a charm, didn't it?

Dins. I'm glad if you think so, but I'm not through feeling rather shaky, yet. Of course, I sent you the letter, you opened it, sealed it up again, and have made a good many people believe that Skerrett did it, but I shouldn't want to be in your boots if they tried to make you prove it.

God. Well, the results are worth the risk, if I succeed in parting the young couple and winning the girl.

Dins. You'd better hurry up and marry her, before any of them find out about the money. Great streak of luck, wasn't it, your getting that affair into your own hands so nicely?

God. I should say so, if it only comes out as I hope it will. (*He turns, and* Rosetta *pulls* Mis' Hazey *out of the door, barely in time to escape detection.*) By the way, it's none too safe talking our private business over here. Somebody might hear us, and then —

Dins. They're all in there gossiping, or out-of-doors somewheres. Of course, it wouldn't do to let it get out, though. The old man may live for months yet. My! won't there be some excitement around here, though, when it is found out that the little country maiden is a great heiress? Let me see, how much is it?

God. Oh, something like fifty thousand dollars. I tell you, I've got to have it. Folks around here don't know that my place is mortgaged, and I am in danger of losing all I've got. They think I'm rich. That girl and her money are my only salvation.

Dins. Well, I must say, I wouldn't want a wife who was forced into marrying me when she loved another man.

God. It's worth it, and I'll soon cure her of that nonsense about Tom Skerrett, once she's my wife. Anyhow, if I get control of the money, what do I care?

Enter Simon Pinner, r.

Sim. Say, you two'd better be go'n' in there, 'f y' want any 'freshments. They'll have 'em all et up.

DINS. That's so, Simon. Much obliged. We'll go right in. (*Going* R.)

GOD. (*following*). Oh, I guess they won't forget us. They know which side their bread is buttered on.

SIM. 'Tain't bread 'n' butter; 's ice cream 'n' cake — good, too. (*Exeunt* DINSMORE *and* GODFREY, R.) Huh! that Godfrey thinks he's the hull thing. I'd like t' see him took down a peg 'r two. (*Enter* ROSETTA GATES, C. D.) Hello, Rosetty. Had your ice cream, yet?

ROS. No, Mr. Pinner, and I don't care whether I have any or not. I have something else to think about. Is Lem Hackett in there?

SIM. Guess he is; was, jest a minute ago.

ROS. Well, would you just as soon go in and tell him to come out here? I want to see him a minute.

SIM. All right, I'll tell 'im. Mebbe they'll f'rgit 'n' give me another dish of ice cream. (*Going* R.)

ROS. You may have mine. Just tell them I said so. I'm too excited to eat anything.

SIM. Be y'? What y' 'xcited about? Anything happened?

ROS. Well, not much — yet; but I shouldn't wonder if something did happen, before long; something that will surprise people, too.

SIM. Y' don't say? Wal, now, I wonder what it is. It'll s'prise me 'f I git another dish of ice cream. (*Exit* R.)

Enter MIS' HAZEY, C. D.

ROS. Oh, Mis' Hazey, try and not say anything about what you overheard, won't you?

MIS' HAZEY. Where's the Baron? It is my money he is after — only my money! my money.

ROS. Of course it is, that's everything he wants; but if you are to outwit him, you mustn't let him know that you suspect such a thing.

MIS' H. No, no, he mustn't know. He said "a fortune to come with her," and he meant me, of course. They said something about Millie Bassett, but she hasn't got a fortune. It's me he's after — me! But we'll outwit him, won't we, Rosetty?

ROS. Yes, yes, if you are only careful and don't say anything. (*Enter* LEM. HACKETT, R.)

LEM. Simon said you wanted to see me, Rosetta.

ROS. Yes, Lem, I do. I hope I didn't take you away from your ice cream?

LEM. No, indeed; I brung it with me. Swallered it hull. Y' don't cheat me out o' no ice cream. Wal, here I am. What's up?

ROS. Lots, Lem, if you want to help Tom and Millie out of their trouble.

LEM. Help 'em? Guess I do. Jest tell me how. Found out anything?

ROS. Well, I've got an idea that I have. I can't quite straighten it out, and I want your help.

LEM. 'N' you can have it, you bet!

ROS. Well, come out in the orchard, and we'll talk it over.

LEM. What about Mis' Hazy, here?

ROS. Well, we'll have to take her along, so as to keep an eye on her. She's the one who put me on the scent, and she knows enough to spoil it all if she should say anything, so we'll have to watch her. Come on. (*Exit*, C. D.)

LEM. Come along, Mis' Hazey; we'll take a little walk. I'll be your beau.

MIS' H. Yes, I'll go with you, b'cause I know you'll protect me from that wicked Baron. He wants to marry me for my money, and I'm afraid he will carry me off. Come, let us fly! (*Taking hold of him.*)

LEM (*as she pulls him toward door*). Fly? Say, hold on there, I ain't got m' wings yet, but I guess you're a "bird," all right. (*She hurries out, pulling him after her.*)

(*Enter* MRS. BASSETT, L. *She goes up and looks out* C. D., *then to* R., *and looks off; finally goes* L. *and calls.*)

MRS. B. Oleander! Olean — der!

OLE. (*off* L.). Yes, ma'am. You want me?

MRS. B. Yes, I do. You come here.

(*Enter* OLEANDER, L.)

MRS. B. I want you t' go in the other room there, 'n' tell Mr. Godfrey t' come out here. Hurry up, too, b'fore somebuddy else comes. I want t' speak t' him alone.

OLE. Yes, ma'am. (*Exit* R.)

MRS. B. I'm goin' t' bring things to a head t'night. The

longer I wait, the more stubborn she gets, 'n' she's got t' give in. (*Enter* GODFREY, R.) I wanted t' see you a minute, Mr. Godfrey.

GOD. Well, here I am. Got some good news for me?

MRS. B. I hope it is. You said you wanted t' marry my daughter, didn't you?

GOD. It's the fondest wish of my heart.

MRS. B. Well, Mr. Godfrey, it's an honor I appreciate, even if she don't, 'n,' if you're willin' t' take her as she is, contrary, 'n' pertendin' she don't want you, but somebuddy else, you can have her. Oh, she'll consent. And she'll be thankful she did, afterwards.

GOD. I feel sure of that, Mrs. Bassett.

MRS. B.. Why, she ought to be as happy as a queen, 'n' she will be after a little while. But, what I wanted t' say was, if you want me t', I'll tell everybuddy here to-night that you're engaged. It'll be a good chance t' settle for good 'n' all.

GOD. An excellent plan, Mrs. Bassett, and nothing could make me happier.

MRS. B. Then I'll fix it. Oh, you needn't look so dubious. Her pa and I have got something t' say yet, 'n' she won't stand out ag'inst us both. (*Voices off*, R.) There, they're comin' in here now, so you leave it t' me. It'll be all settled b'fore you leave here t'night, and the wedding can take place jest as soon as you say.

(*Enter* R., MR. PROSSER, *followed by* SIMON PINNER, *and the other guests.* MRS. BASSETT *is* L.; GODFREY, L. C.; MR. PROSSER, R., *and* SIMON *and the others up stage, some sitting, and some standing about.*)

MR. P. We thought, Mrs. Bassett, that seeing we had had our refreshments, we would now proceed to the entertainment which has been provided. I believe the choir has consented to sing an anthem for us.

SIM. I don't see the leader here. We can't do it without him.

MR. P. Anybody know where Mr. Hackett is?

(*Enter* OLEANDER, R.)

MRS. B. Oleander, d' you know where Lem Hackett is?

OLE. I see him goin' towards the orchard with Rosetty Gates, a few minutes ago.

MRS. B. Wal, you go 'n' find him, 'n' tell him he's wanted here t' lead the choir in their anthum.

DINS. Permit me to go. (OLEANDER *has started, but remains, as* DINSMORE *hurries out* C. D.)

OLE. (*giggling*). That started him. He's jealous b'cause I said Lem Hackett was with Rosetta.

MRS. B. Oleander, you tend t' y'r own affairs. Stop y'r gigglin' !

MR. P. Well, I guess we shall have to postpone the singing for a few minutes. Has anyone else anything to offer ?

OLE. I know a piece. (*Giggles.*)

MR. P. Very well. We will listen to a recitation by Miss Oleander.

OLE. It ain't a recitation, it's jest a piece I learned for the school exhibition. (*She giggles again, and* MRS. BASSETT *pinches her arm.*) Ouch !

MRS. B. Wal, stop y'r gigglin', then, and b'have y'rself. If y'r goin' t' speak that piece, try t' keep y'r face straight, 'n' do it decent.

(*The others seat themselves about stage, while* OLEANDER *goes to* R. C., *makes an awkward bow and recites a childish selection in a hesitating, schoolgirl fashion, almost breaking down in places, starting over again, etc., but at last gaining confidence and giving the last few lines with considerable of a flourish. The people have listened patiently, one or two showing some amusement, but at the end applauding vociferously. If desired, others of the company may sing or recite. It should all be in an uncouth, country style, intended only to make fun for the audience. When there is a pause,* LEM HACKETT *enters* C. D.)

LEM. Want me, do you ?

SIM. Yes, Lem, it's time f'r th' anthum. (*He has procured the books which he now gives to those composing the choir. One of the women plays the organ, and the "choir" sings an old-fashioned church anthem,* LEM HACKETT *leading with an air of importance. The singing should be somewhat funny, in imitation of a country choir, but not too much of a burlesque. During the singing,* ROSETTA GATES, MIS' HAZEY, *and* DINSMORE *enter,* C. D., *and listen. Just as the singing is*

finished, MILLIE *enters* C. D., *and stands up* C. MRS. BASSETT *sees her, and unnoticed by the others goes up and whispers to her, with a determined air.* MILLIE *looks frightened, starts to remonstrate, but is silenced by the stern look of her mother, who now goes down to* C.)

MRS. B. Now, friends, before you go home, I have something to tell you all. It's something I'm proud t' tell y', for it concerns my daughter and her future. (*She stands* L. C., GODFREY *is* R., JOEL, R. C., *somewhat back, and the others grouped* R. *and* L. *at the back, with* MILLIE *prominent* C., *well up.*) I want to announce that she is engaged to be married to —

JOEL (*stepping forward*). Mother!

Enter TOM SKERRETT, C.; *he stands back, unnoticed by all except* MILLIE. *She casts a frightened, beseeching glance at him, but does not stir.* MRS. BASSETT *glares at* JOEL, *and he draws back without saying more.*

MRS. B. Yes, I have the honor to announce that Millie Bassett has accepted one well known to you all, and I announce that she is engaged to be married to —

(GODFREY *has advanced slightly toward* C., *with a pleased, expectant air;* MILLIE *has also come down* C. *part way, at first showing no resistance; all the others look very much interested in what is transpiring. Just as* MRS. BASSETT *says "to be married to —"* MILLIE *turns toward* TOM, *who comes down. She goes to him and finishes* MRS. BASSETT'S *sentence in a clear, firm voice.*)

MIL. To Tom Skerrett!

(TOM *puts his arm about* MILLIE *and they face* MRS. BASSETT *boldly; she falls back, too surprised and enraged to speak.* JOEL *looks incredulous, but joyful,* GODFREY *crestfallen;* ROSETTA GATES *beams with satisfaction;* OLEANDER *giggles, and all the others seem overcome with surprise, with the exception of* MIS' HAZEY, *who approaches* GODFREY *and points at him with a gesture of scorn and exultation. Tableau.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE. — *Same as Act II, one month later. It is about eight o'clock in the evening.* OLEANDER, *in her best dress, is discovered arranging flowers in a vase on mantel or stand. She is in an unusually sober mood. After a pause there is a knock* C. D. *She goes and opens door, admitting* SIMON PINNER. *He is "dressed up," and carries a package.*)

OLE. Good evenin', Mr. Pinner. You come early, didn't y'?

SIM. Guess I did, ruther. Didn't want t' miss nothin', y' know. Don't git asked to a wedd'n' ev'ry day. Here's my present.

OLE. (*taking package*). Shall I undo it?

SIM. Yes. See 'f you think she'll like it. (OLEANDER *removes paper, disclosing a large wooden spoon and a ladle.*) Y' see, I whittled 'em out m'self.

OLE. Of course she'll like 'em, then. I'll put 'em with the other things here on the table.

(*She goes up* R., *where a table is covered with an assortment of the gifts usually seen at a country wedding. There are some vases, a small clock, picture frames, numerous dishes, etc., etc.*)

SIM. (*surveying articles on table*). Got a lot o' nice things, ain't she?

OLE. Yes, but land! that ain't all of 'em. They's a lot more bigger things in the other room. (*There is another knock on* C. D. OLEANDER *opens it and* ROSETTA GATES *enters.*)

ROS. I guess I'm early, but I couldn't wait. I was too excited to stay away another minute. Good evening, Mr. Pinner. I see you beat me, anyway.

SIM. Yes, I b'lieve in goin' early 'n' avoid'n' the rush.

ROS. So do I. Where's Millie, Oleander?

OLE. Up in her room. I was jest helpin' her put on her dress 'n' things.

ROS. Is her mother with her, or anybody?

OLE. No, she wouldn't let her in. She locked the door.

ROS. Oh, I guess she'll let me in. I'm going right up.

OLE. All right. She'll see you, of course. (*Exit* ROSETTA, L.) Want t' go 'n the other room, Mr. Pinner, and see the rest of the presents?

SIM. Don't care 'f I do. (*Knock* C. D.) I bet that's Lem Hackett. (OLEANDER *admits* LEM HACKETT.) Hello, Lem! I knew that was you.

LEM. Wal, 'tis. Where's Mr. Bassett?

OLE. Oh, he's around here somewhere. Want t' see him?

LEM. Yes, I do, 'n' mighty quick, too. Got a lot t' see to b'fore that wedd'n' comes off.

SIM. Wedd'n'? Seems t' me more like a fun'ral.

OLE. I wish it was — Mis' Bassett's. (*Giggling.*)

SIM. That's wicked.

OLE. I don't care. That's all the fun I ever git 'round here, bein' wicked. Guess I'd have t' be a heap worse 'n I be, 'f I was t' git as wicked as Mis' Bassett is. She's a reg'lar old murderess, that's what she is.

SIM. Who's she murdered?

OLE. Well, ain't it killin' Millie, havin' t' marry that old Godfrey? It'll be a livin' death to her, bein' his wife, when she wants Tom Skerrett so.

SIM. Wal, I s'pose they ain't no help for it, now.

OLE. I guess not, when the weddin's t' take place at half-past eight, 'n' it's 'most eight now.

LEM. Might be a mericle.

SIM. I guess it 'd take one, t' p'rvent Mis' Bassett havin' her own way.

LEM. I'm goin' t' find Joel. (*Goes* L.) S'pose he's in the kitchen, Oleander?

OLE. No, I guess you'll find him out 'n the yard somewheres. You'll think it's a fun'ral, when y' see him.

LEM. Wal, I'll go out 'n' see 'f I can't cheer him up. That's a kind of a specialty o' mine. (*Exit* C. D.)

OLE. Huh! I d' know how he's go'n' t' do it. Mr. Bassett's 's glum as a gravestone. Can't cheer him up.

SIM. Wal, what 'd he want t' consent t' Millie's givin' up Tom Skerrett 'n' marryin' Godfrey f'r, anyway? She wouldn't 'a' done it 'f he hadn't set in 'n' told her she'd better.

OLE. Beats me. They's some reason for it, but I d' know what 'tis. Mis' Bassett rules this roost, I c'n tell y'. (*Enter* MRS. BASSETT, R., *in time to hear* OLEANDER'S *last sentence.*)

MRS. B. What's that? Wal, I guess I do, you impudent thing, 'n' I'll see 't you don't roost here any more, 'f you ain't careful. (OLEANDER *giggles.*) Gigglin' again! If you ain't a case.

OLE. Yes, ma'am, but not a case f'r a lawyer, though — if it was some lawyers I know.

MRS. B. What! (*Goes at her, as if to strike her.* OLEANDER *dodges and runs off* L.) That gal gits worse 'n' worse every day. I used t' think mebbe I could manage her sometime, but I've about give up.

SIM. That so? Must be discouragin', when y'r s' used t' managin' folks.

MRS. B. What d' you mean by that?

SIM. Oh, nothin'.

MRS. B. Yes, you do, too. You're flingin' out about my daughter. I want you t' know it ain't none o' your business, 'n' I know what's f'r her good. She's marryin' Mr. Godfrey of her own free will, 'n' if anybuddy says she ain't, you c'n tell 'em it ain't no sech thing.

SIM. They wouldn't b'lieve that, Mis' Bassett, if she told 'em so herself.

MRS. B. Wal, of all things! How dast you stand there 'n' talk t' me like that, Simon Pinner? You, of all folks — lazy, shif'less thing! (*Knock* C. D. *She goes up.*) It's a good thing f'r you that y' ain't worth noticin'. (*Opens door, admitting* MR. PROSSER *and* CLARENCE DINSMORE.) Good evenin'. Come right in.

MR. P. Good evening, Mrs. Bassett. Ah, Mr. Pinner, how do you do?

SIM. Pretty well, thank y'.

(*They all exchange greetings.*)

MRS. B. Everything's all ready. (DINSMORE *is up by table looking at gifts.*) Ain't she got a nice lot o' presents, Mr. Dinsmore? My, she ought t' be a proud girl! I guess we've seen the last of Tom Skerrett. I heard he was goin' t' go away somewhere, 'n' I hope t' goodness he will.

DINS. That doesn't seem like Tom. I hardly believe it.

MRS. B. Wal, that's what I heard.

MR. P. I am quite sure it is a mistake. Tom Skerrett will stay here. Nothing, I venture to say, can cause him to go away.

MRS. B. I know one thing, though, he won't come around this house, 'n' I guess when Millie Bassett becomes Mrs. Joseph Godfrey, he'll make up his mind t' keep away from her. Don't you want t' go in the other room 'n' see the rest of the presents, Mr. Prosser? It's about a half an hour before the time for the ceremony.

MR. P. Yes. (*As he goes* R.) Before the ceremony, Mrs. Bassett, which it gives me more pain than pleasure to think of performing.

MRS. B. Land! y' needn't feel that way about it; if you didn't do it, some other minister would. (*Exeunt* R.)

DINS. (*looking after her*). I don't know what I wouldn't give to outwit that woman.

Enter MILLIE *and* ROSETTA, L. MILLIE *wears her wedding dress, but has not yet put on the veil.*

ROS. Oh, Mr. Dinsmore, you here? Look, here's Millie, just dying with grief. Isn't it awful, to think of such a wedding? I've been trying to console her, but I can't. I don't feel much more cheerful myself.

DINS. (*near* MILLIE, C.; ROSETTA, L.). It is not too late to rebel, even now, Miss Bassett. It would be far better to refuse to become an unwilling wife, even at the eleventh hour, than to know a life-long regret.

ROS. That's what I say. It's terrible, and if I was her I wouldn't do it — not for all the mothers in the world. I'd just assert my rights, and say "I won't!"

MIL. You don't understand. I cannot back out now. There is some reason I do not understand why I must be that man's wife. For mother alone I would not do it, but father has told me enough to make me know that I must do it for his sake.

ROS. But why — what?

MIL. I don't know. I only know that something terrible must happen if I do not consent, and I will, for my father. I know he would not allow it if it were not necessary and

for the best, so I have made up my mind to make no further resistance, to marry Joseph Godfrey, and to be a true wife to him. He shall never hear a word of reproach from my lips, for if I cannot be happy, I can at least be uncomplaining and patient.

Ros. Well, that's more than I could be, with a man I didn't want. It's too much. I don't believe any woman is called upon to make such a sacrifice. Do you, Clarence?

Dins. I — I don't feel competent to give advice in such a case. (*Going up.*) I can only admire the woman who will make such a sacrifice for another's sake, and despise the man who forces it. Not for all the world would I take an unwilling bride.

Ros. You won't need to, when —

Dins. When I can get such a willing one. Is that it?

(*She goes to him and he puts his arm about her, kissing her.* Millie *sinks into a chair,* L., *covering her face and weeping.*)

Ros. Oh, how selfish we are, to be so happy at such a time. (*She goes to* Millie, *caressing her.*)

Mil. (*looking up*). No, it would be selfish in me not to be glad you are so happy, but — but to see you makes me realize all that I am losing. Oh, I cannot do it! I cannot! I cannot! (*Weeping.*)

Ros. And you won't! Say you won't, Millie; it isn't too late yet.

Mil. (*rising and trying to be brave*). Yes, it is too late. I shall not give way again. I will go up-stairs now, and get ready. Will you come, Rosetta?

Ros. Yes, in just a minute. I want to speak to Clarence first.

Mil. Very well. I want you to help me fix my veil.

Ros. Yes, I'll come right away. (*Exit* Millie, L.) Her veil! Dear me, I feel as if it was her shroud. It might as well be, almost.

Dins. That doesn't sound very cheerful, I must say.

Ros. Of course it doesn't, but what do you expect? See here, there's something you're not telling me. Now, confess.

Dins. Why, what do you mean?

Ros. Oh, you know, well enough. You and Lem Hackett have been having a lot of mysterious business lately. I want to know what it's all about.

DINS. Why, Rosetta, you know. Didn't I come right over to your side, after you overheard Godfrey and me talking the night of the sociable? Haven't I turned traitor to him, and done all I could to help Lem clear Tom of suspicion?

ROS. M'm —well, yes, perhaps. You knew you had to, if I was ever to speak to you again, and I rewarded you by promising to be your wife. You came over to our side, but you haven't told me all that you have accomplished, you and Lem. There's something I don't know.

DINS. And it's too much for your curiosity. I see. Well, I can't tell you. I am pledged to absolute secrecy, but —

ROS. A secret — from me? It isn't right. Why, the idea! we're engaged, and here you are with a secret from me. (*Pouting.*) I didn't think you would treat me like this.

DINS. (*coaxing her*). But, Rosetta —

ROS. (*drawing away from him*). Leave me alone! I thought you loved me too much for this.

DINS. Now, Rosetta, don't disappoint me. Don't be like some girls and mistrust the man who loves you, at the very first. I know I did wrong; I came near being a villain, and if it hadn't been for you, there is no saying what would have become of me. You have been my salvation. Don't spoil it all by not believing in me a little longer.

ROS. (*weakening*). But, Clarence, you — I — you shouldn't have a secret —

DINS. It isn't my secret, dear. I could not tell you, because — well, if you can be patient only a little while longer, you will know all, and I promise you it will be worth waiting for.

ROS. Then I will. I'll wait, and I will never doubt you again. Wasn't I foolish? But you'll forgive me, won't you?

DINS. Why, of course I will. I don't blame you a bit, only —

ROS. Only —(*hesitating*) it — it's something about Millie's fortune. Isn't it?

DINS. Now, that would be telling, and you promised —

ROS. Yes, I know, but — it's so hard to know just enough to make you wonder what it is you don't know. And I — I'm a woman, you know.

DINS. Yes, and the dearest little woman in the world, too. (*Kissing her.*)

Ros. I shall try to be — to you, dear, and — I will keep my promise. There! I must go up-stairs now. Millie will wonder what has become of me. (*She runs out* L. *He stands a moment looking after her, with a look of pride and happiness. After a slight pause,* JOEL BASSETT *enters* L.) Ah, Mr. Bassett, good evening.

JOEL. Good evening, Mr. Dinsmore. Where's all the folks?

DINS. Well, a number of them are in the other room. Lem Hackett went out to find you. Didn't you see him?

JOEL. No. I guess I was up-stairs. Most time for the ceremony, ain't it?

DINS. I guess it is. (*Looking at his watch.*) There's half an hour yet. Godfrey hasn't arrived.

JOEL. That so? He'll be here on time, though. No danger that he won't turn up. Do y' know, Mr. Dinsmore, I feel as if I was buryin' my daughter? I'd almost ruther, th'n see her married t' that man.

DINS. You're the third one who has called this wedding a funeral within the last half hour. I declare, if Lem Hackett doesn't — I — (JOEL *has sat down, and now sits with his face buried in his hands*) — I say, Mr. Bassett, don't feel that way. It isn't so bad, after all.

JOEL (*looking up*). Not bad? How could it be worse? My Millie marryin' a man she don't want, and givin' up one she loves? And I — I had t' make her do it.

DINS. It was for her own sake, Mr. Bassett.

JOEL. I thought it was for the best. It was to save her — yes; but it was more for my own sake. You don't know, and you mustn't know. Nobuddy must know. But I meant it for the best — I meant it for the best! (*He rises and slowly exits* R., *with his head bowed and almost sobbing.*)

DINS. Poor old man. It was hard not to tell him. Little he realizes that I know it all, and that — (LEM HACKETT *puts his head in* C. D.) Hello, Lem, that you?

LEM. Yes, it's me. You all alone?

DINS. Yes, just at present.

LEM. That's good; then we'll resk it. (*Motioning to some one without.*) Come on in, they ain't nobuddy here. (*Smiling at* DINSMORE.) Wal, I mean nobuddy much. (TOM SKERRETT *enters* C.) I mean nobuddy y' don't want t' see.

DINS. Ah, Tom, I'm glad to see you. (*Shakes hands with* TOM.) Say it's a funeral.

TOM. Why, what do you mean?

DINS. Well, that's what everybody seems to think, and I should think you'd feel that way if anybody does.

LEM. Not much. I've cheered him up.

DINS. Oh, that's it? I'm glad to hear it.

TOM (*smiling*). Yes, strange as it may seem, Lem has cheered me up.

DINS. Well, well, what's going to happen?

LEM. Yes — what? Just wait and see. Something 'll happen, I'll guarantee. Ain't it most time f'r the ceremony?

DINS. Yes. Have you arranged everything?

LEM. Trust me for that. You and Tom go in. (*Going* L. *and looking off.*) I wonder where Oleander is. (*Calling, cautiously.*) Oleander! She don't seem t' hear. I'll go 'n' find her, 'n' have her get the bride. If I only don't run up ag'inst the old lady. You go on in there (*motioning* R.), and wait. (*Exit* L.)

DINS. Come, Tom.

TOM. Yes — I — but I'm all in a daze. I don't seem to realize —

DINS. But you will, soon. If there has got to be a wedding, you might as well be there.

TOM. Yes, I want to be there when it takes place, and I mean to be, too.

DINS. Yes, even Mrs. Bassett and Joe Godfrey himself shall not deny you that privilege. Come on.

(DINSMORE *goes out* R. *followed by* TOM. *After a pause*, LEM HACKETT *enters* L., *followed by* ROSETTA GATES *and* MILLIE, *the latter now wearing her veil. She looks pale and sad;* ROSETTA *tries to appear cheerful and to comfort her, while* LEM *puts on a long face which evidently does not suit his feelings. He leads them across stage, and they exeunt* R., *without a word. As they disappear,* OLEANDER *enters* L. *She looks after them with great interest, follows them to* R. *and stares off.*)

OLE. Poor thing, she looks more like a ghost than a bride. I wish that old Godfrey 'd drop dead before he could ever git here t' be married to her. I s'pose it's wicked t'

wish that, but it ain't half s' wicked as 'tis fer her t' be made t' break her heart like this. Oh, I jest hate Mis' Bassett! I hate her! (*She goes back to* C. *as* MRS. BASSETT *enters* R.)

MRS. B. Oh, here y' are. I was lookin' for y'. I want y' t' see 'f my dress is all right b'hind. Sech a time as I had gitt'n' fixed, 'n' you wa'n't nowheres t' be found. (*Turning about for inspection.*) Is it all right?

OLE. Yes, ma'am. You look fine, but I don't see how you can do it.

MRS. B. Do what? Wear this dress? Land, didn't I have it made a purpose f'r Millie's wedd'n'?

OLE. I didn't mean that. I meant make Millie marry that —

MRS. B. There! you needn't say no more. Comments from you ain't necessary. You jest attend t' y'r own affairs 'n' we'll run ours.

OLE. Yes, ma'am — but I think it's dreadful! (*Blubbering.*) She don't want t' marry him; she wants — Tom Skerrett.

MRS. B. (*cuffing her*). There, take that, you impudent, meddling thing!

OLE. I don't care! I'd ruther go back t' the poor house, anyway, th'n live in the house with you.

MRS. B. Wal, that's where you c'n go, then, f'r all me. You go up-stairs, now, 'n' see if Millie ain't ready. It's almost time.

OLE. No, ma'am, I ain't goin'.

MRS. B. What's that? You won't go?

OLE. No, ma'am, I won't — not t' tell her it's time t' come 'n' marry that man. She won't come t' be his wife through none o' my callin'.

MRS. B. Wal, of all things! I'll go m'self then. (*She exits* L. *indignantly.*)

(OLEANDER *looks after her defiantly, making a face, giggling. The door* C. *opens cautiously, and* MIS' HAZEY *looks in.*)

MIS' HAZEY. Am I late to the wedd'n'?

OLE. No, Mis' Hazey; come right in.

MIS' H. (*with an air of great importance*). After much hesitation, I have decided to honor the occasion with my presence. I am the Queen! Do you comprehend, minion

— the Queen! I come to see the downfall of the wicked Baron. He thought to wed me, but I outwitted him, and now he seeks revenge. But let him beware! beware, I say!

OLE. That's what I say, 'n' I hope you're right, if you mean that Mr. Godfrey.

MIS' H. No, no! The Baron! The day of reckoning has come.

OLE. Goodness, ain't she loony? (*Giggling.*) Here, Queen, you set here. (*Placing a chair up* L.) It'll soon be time f'r the wedd'n'.

MIS' H. (*pointing to chair*). Here? Is this the seat of honor? Is it a throne?

OLE. Oh, my, yes! Jest you set in it 'n' it'll be one. (*She leads* MIS' HAZEY *up and seats her in chair. There is a knock* C., *and* OLEANDER *goes and admits several villagers, who come in looking curiously about, whispering together, etc.* OLEANDER *gives them seats up stage* R. *and* L. *One or two of them inspect the presents on table, and while all this is going on* GODFREY *enters* C. *He comes down to* R. C., *the others regarding him with interest.* MIS' HAZEY *starts up with a show of excitement, then sinks back into her chair, muttering to herself.* OLEANDER *is down near* GODFREY.)

GOD. I hope I'm not late? (*To* OLEANDER.)

OLE. No, sir; they's plenty of time. (*Under her breath.*) Land knows, if I's the bride, I'd wish you'd never come.

GOD. What did you say?

OLE. I said, I'll go 'n' tell Mis' Bassett you're here. (*Starts* L.)

GOD. Is Dinsmore here?

OLE. Yes; he's in the other room there. (*Indicating* R.)

GOD. Well, go and tell him I want him here. He's to be my best man.

OLE. (*going* R.) Best man? I guess not. If you want t' know who's the best man around here, it's Tom Skerrett. (*She hurries out* R.)

GOD. That girl needs me for a master. I'd soon tame her.

Enter MRS. BASSETT, L.

MRS. B. (*to the guests*). Good evenin'. (*Crossing to* GODFREY.) Everything's all ready, 'n' I'm glad you've come.

Let me take your hat 'n' coat. (*She takes his things and goes to* R.) I'll tell 'em it's time, if you're ready.

GOD. Yes, as soon as Mr. Dinsmore comes. Oleander has gone for him.

MRS. B. Oh! wal, I'll tell him t' hurry up. Oh, Joseph, you don't know how proud and happy I am.

GOD. Yes, I understand. It's time for the ceremony, I believe.

MRS. B. Yes, it is. Where's Miss Barber? Oh, there she is! (*Goes up and speaks to one of the guests.*) Now, Miss Barber, if you'll be ready t' play the wedd'n' march.

(*A young lady seats herself at the organ and prepares to play. Enter* CLARENCE DINSMORE, R.)

DINS. (*going to* GODFREY). Came near being late, didn't you?

GOD. No, I guess not. (*To* MRS. BASSETT.) Tell them we are ready.

MRS. B. (*down* R. C.). Yes, I will. I went up-stairs 't' find Millie, but she wa'n't there. I s'pose she's in the other room, ain't she, Mr. Dinsmore?

DINS. Yes.

(MRS. BASSETT *goes out* R. GODFREY *and* DINSMORE *go up* C., *where they stand waiting. The wedding march is played on the organ, and after a pause* JOEL *enters* R., *with* MILLIE *on his arm, preceded by* MR. PROSSER, *who goes up and takes his place* C. MRS. BASSETT, DINSMORE, ROSETTA, LEM HACKETT, SIMON PINNER *and* OLEANDER *also enter from* R., *and stand* R. C. MILLIE *meets* GODFREY *up* C., *and they stand facing* MR. PROSSER, *with their backs to the audience. The music stops and* MR. PROSSER *reads the marriage service.* GODFREY *answers "I do!" when the question is put to him, but when the minister says to* MILLIE, "*Do you take this man, etc.,*" *she turns slightly and replies in a firm voice, "No!" There is a moment's pause and a sense of excitement.* MRS. BASSETT *starts forward with her mouth open, as if to say something, but for an instant simply stares at* MILLIE *in speechless rage and amazement.* JOEL, DINSMORE, LEM HACKETT *and* MR. PROSSER *show no surprise, but the others look on in astonishment, beginning to murmur in suppressed*

tones. Finally, MRS. BASSETT *faces* MILLIE *furiously and speaks.*)

MRS. B. You — what do you mean? Did you —

MIL. I said "No," and I mean it. I will not, I cannot, be that man's wife. (*She at first seems about to falter, but gathers strength and speaks with boldness, pointing to* GODFREY, *who at first looks too amazed and crestfallen to speak.*)

MRS. B. I don't believe it! I won't! You shall be his wife — I say you shall!

MIL. Never!

GOD. (*going to her and speaking in subdued, passionate tones*). You can't back out now. Don't you dare! I won't be made a fool of like this.

JOEL. Wait a minute. She means what she says, and I back her up in it.

MRS. B. You! You don't dast do sech a thing. (*To* MILLIE.) Come, now, no more foolin'. (*To the minister.*) Go on with the ceremony. She'll say "Yes" this time. (*Aside to* MILLIE *threateningly.*) You'd better!

MIL. No; my answer shall be the same, now and always. I cannot be that man's wife, because —

MRS. B. Well, why? Say why you can't.

MIL. Because I am already a wife — (TOM SKERRETT *enters* R., *and she goes to him*) and here is my husband!

(TOM *puts his arm about her, and they face* GODFREY *and* MRS. BASSETT, *who fall back in utter amazement and confusion.* MRS. BASSETT *is the first to recover. She is fairly livid with rage as she turns to* JOEL.)

MRS. B. Joel Bassett, is this true?

JOEL. Yes, mother.

MRS. B. I don't believe it! It can't be! How — when —

TOM. We were married, Mrs. Bassett, not ten minutes ago, in (*pointing* R.) that room.

MR. P. Yes, Mrs. Bassett — by me.

GOD. So you are in it, too? A pretty piece of business for a minister.

MR. P. I think so. Better than to have married her to you.

(GODFREY *turns away with chagrin which he vainly seeks to hide, and goes up* R. MRS. BASSETT *has sunk into a chair* L., *and is clasping her hands and grating her teeth, rocking from side to side, in speechless rage.*)

MR. P. No doubt a few words of explanation are necessary. I have no compunctions in saying that I performed the ceremony in that room just now willingly and gladly, for the circumstances are such as to justify, I believe, what I have done.

MRS. B. (*springing up and bursting into a torrent of enraged talk*). Oh, you do, do you? Then I'd like t' know what you call justice? Nice business, I call it, when a girl has promised to marry one man, to marry her to another, and then go s' far 's t' stand up and go half way through another ceremony. A pretty minister, you be! You ought t' be churched!

TOM. Wait, Mrs. Bassett! Mr. Prosser has done perfectly right. He lent himself to our plans because we convinced him that we were justified in thus getting the best of a man who has stooped to deceit and villainy to win one whom he wants only for her money —

MRS. B. Ho! money? A heap she's got! She ain't worth a penny.

TOM. You are mistaken, Mrs. Bassett. She is heiress to fifty thousand dollars.

MRS. B. A likely story!

TOM (*pointing to* GODFREY). Ask him!

GOD. (*sullenly*). Yes — it is the truth.

MRS. B. Millie Bassett an heiress? fifty thousand dollars? How — I — I don't understand.

MIL. From my father.

MRS. B. What! Your — father?

MIL. Yes, my father — Henry Bassett!

MRS. B. You know! (*She shrieks and again falls into the chair, completely overcome.*)

JOEL. Yes, mother, from Henry. He died a month ago — rich.

MRS. B. So you've told her the secret we both swore t' keep to our dyin' day? You've told her — you? Oh! Oh! Oh! (*Hysterical.*)

L. of C.

JOEL. No, no, I didn't tell her. It wasn't me.

TOM. I am her husband now, Mrs. Bassett, and I will explain. It is true, Millie has been told the secret of her life. She knows that Joel Bassett is not her real father, but her uncle instead, and that —

MRS. B. (*springing up*). That her own father was a rascal, a thief? That he was sent t' prison a month b'fore she was born, that it killed her mother when she was a week old, and that we swore t' bring her up as our own daughter 'n' never let her know her disgrace? She knows all that too, I s'pose?

TOM. Yes, and more than even you know. She knows that her father was released from prison ten years ago, and that he went to the Far West, where he made an immense fortune. She knows that about two months ago, taken with an illness from which he had no hopes of recovering, he engaged Joseph Godfrey to make his will in his daughter's favor, and that Godfrey, concealing the fact of his existence and her inheritance —

GOD. Well, if I did? That was a strict requirement of Henry Bassett's contract with me — that she was to know nothing of it till he was dead!

TOM. Yes; but he did not require that you should marry her in the meantime, that you might get possession of her money, did he? And that is what you tried to do. Can you deny it?

GOD. No. What's the use? But for you I would have done it, too.

TOM. No; but for my good friend here — Lem Hackett.

GOD. Hackett? Ah, so I owe some of it to him, do I?

LEM (*stepping forward*). Yes, thank the Lord, t' me. Y' see, Godfrey, I turned detective and ferreted out a few things. But I had some pretty good assistants. Let me int'rduce 'em. (*Turning and pointing to* DINSMORE, *then to* ROSETTA GATES.) Clarence Dinsmore and his feeancy, Rosetta Gates.

(DINSMORE *leads* ROSETTA *forward and they bow to* GODFREY *with mock civility.*)

GOD. Indeed! Dinsmore, eh? (*To* DINSMORE.) I see I cannot even trust one whom I considered my friend.

DINS. Sorry for you, Joseph, but it had to be.

Ros. Yes, sir, it had to be. You see, I made him. Oh, we found out all about the registered letter, and Clarence had to help me — us, I mean — or — well, he knows what.

Dins. (*his arm about her*) Or lose the dear little girl who is all the world to him.

God. Well, I wish you happiness, I'm sure, the whole lot of you. Good evening. (*He exits* C. D)

Ole. (*going and shutting the door vigorously after him*). And good riddance of bad rubbish, too, you old woodchuck! (*Giggling. As she giggles she looks mischievously at* Mrs. Bassett, *and, meeting with no reproof, goes to her and giggles close to her ear.*) I'm a-gigglin'!

Mrs. B. (*who has been looking on in a dazed condition, with mingled surprise and anger, now turns quickly to* Oleander *and speaks sharply*). I don't care 'f you be. Giggle all y' want t'!

Ole. My! (*Suddenly sober.*) What's a-goin' t' happen? (*Retires to* L.)

Tom (*turning to the guests, who have all shown much interest in what has been transpiring*). Friends, for I hope you will let me call you my friends now — there is no longer any suspicion attached to my name. My innocence has been fully proven, and I have been rewarded by the greatest blessing any man can have — the woman he loves and the best wife in the world I hope you all will congratulate us.

(*With expressions of "We will!" "We do!" etc., the guests crowd about* Tom *and* Millie, *shaking their hands, speaking words of congratulation, etc., then putting on their hats, etc., which* Oleander *has in the meantime produced, and going out* C. D. Mr. Prosser, Dinsmore, Rosetta, Lem Hackett, Simon Pinner *and* Mis' Hazey *remain with* Joel, Mrs. Bassett, Tom *and* Millie. *During the foregoing scene,* Mis' Hazey *has shown interest at times, then sinking back in her chair and muttering to herself. As the others go out, she rises, goes toward* C. D., *and waves her hand excitedly.*)

Mis' Hazey. Yonder goes the wicked Baron — defeated! May he be hurled over the cliff of the haunted ravine and never be seen again!

Joel. I guess somebuddy 'd better take her home. All this 'll be too much f'r her, I'm afeared.

SIM. I will. I'm goin' right her way. 'N' I want t' say 't I'm jest about dumflustered by all I've heared, 'n' I guess I'll have t' go hum 'n' think it over. Never did see no sech 'xcitement's this 'n all my borned days. I guess folks 'll have somethin' t' talk about f'r a week 'r so.

TOM. Well, yes, Simon, I expect they will. But we thought it best to let everything be known

SIM. Sensible, too. 'F y' hadn't, they'd 'a' fixed it up t' suit themselves, 'n' no sayin' what kind of a mess they'd 'a' made of it. Wal, good night, ev'rybuddy, 'n' much joy. (*He takes* MIS' HAZEY *on his arm and they go toward* C. D. *She looks at him with a haughty stare, then draws away from him and points out* C. D.)

MIS' H. Go, minion! I am the Queen. Begone, and I will follow thee!

(*He chuckles, and with a shake of his head at the others, goes out, followed by her.* MRS. BASSETT *is seated* L. C., JOEL *standing at her* L.; TOM *and* MILLIE *stand* C., ROSETTA *and* DINSMORE *up* R.; LEM HACKETT *and* MR. PROSSER, *down* R.; OLEANDER *up* L.)

JOEL (*after a pause, looking down tenderly at* MRS. BASSETT, *who sits with drooping head*). Mother! (*She does not answer nor look up, and after a moment's silence he touches her shoulder gently and bends down, speaking with a voice trembling with emotion.*) Mother! won't y' speak t' me? Don't y' see it's all f'r the best?

MRS. B. You don't care what I think now, none of y'. You've got the best of me 'n' had y'r own way, 'n' y' ought t' be satisfied.

JOEL. No, mother, we ain't. We want you t' say you f'rgive us, 'n' let us all be happy t'gether.

MRS. B. (*rising, with cold indifference and turning as if to go*). No, you will be happier without me. I'll go away 'n' not bother any of y' any longer. I c'n make my livin' some way.

JOEL. Mother! you don't mean that. You won't — go — away?

MRS. B. Yes. Nobuddy wants me here.

MIL. (*going to her and speaking pleadingly*). We all want you. Don't we, father?

JOEL. Why, of course we do.

MRS. B. He ain't your father, 'n' I — (*She stops, as if almost overcome with emotion, and starts to go* L.)

MIL. He is all the father I ever knew. He is my father, and you — you are my mother. I want you to love me, and I — I love you!

MRS. B. No, you don't love me. (*She has turned and now looks at* MILLIE, *almost in tears.*) How can you — how can anybuddy, after the way I've done? You're rich now 'n' got the man you want. You don't want me.

MIL. Oh, mother — I do! So does father.

JOEL. Yes, mother.

MIL. (*turning to* TOM *and holding out her hand; he takes it and she leads him up to* MRS. BASSETT). And so does Tom.

MRS. B. Not — Tom? Tom, you — you can't forgive me?

TOM. Yes, Mrs. Bassett — mother! — I do. All shall be forgiven and forgotten. We are too happy to let one unpleasant thought remain.

(MRS. BASSETT *has gone to the chair* L. C., *and stands with one hand on it; she now sinks into the seat, covers her face with her hands and sobs.*)

JOEL (*bending over her, with an arm about her shoulders*). Oh, mother, don't! I can't stand it. (*He drops on his knees beside her chair and buries his face in her lap.*)

MRS. B. (*looking up, tearfully, first at* JOEL, *putting her left arm around his neck; then looking up at* TOM *and* MILLIE *and holding out her hand*). I — I don't deserve it, but I — I'm so glad!

(MILLIE *takes her hand, kisses her and stands at her* R.; TOM *behind her chair.* DINSMORE *and* ROSETTA *have gone up* C., *where they are preparing to go; he now puts his arm about her, and they exeunt* C. D., *pausing briefly in the door and looking back with a smile.* MR. PROSSER *follows them out.* OLEANDER *has been watching the scene, at first with a slight show of amusement, which gradually changes to soberness, and now she slyly wipes her eyes.* LEM, *with a happy expression, goes across to her and they exeunt* L., *just as the curtain falls.*)

CURTAIN.

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